

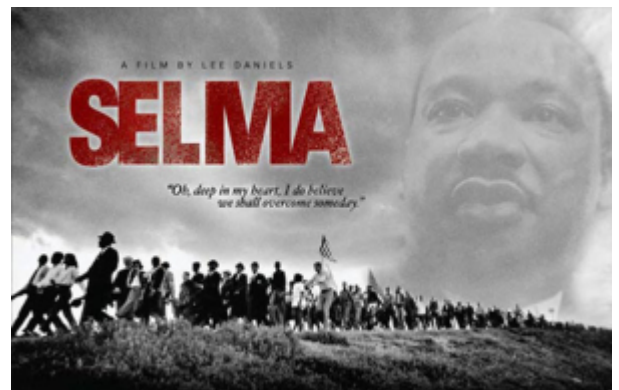
A Disappointing 'Selma' Film

Exclusive: At a moment when voting and other civil rights are under attack in America, a new movie "Selma" recounts the struggle, led by Martin Luther King Jr., to secure the African-American right to vote. But the film falls short in both telling key facts and conveying the drama, says James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

In post-World War II American history, with the exception of John F. Kennedy, perhaps no other figure grips the public imagination like Martin Luther King Jr. does. And as with Kennedy, questions about the original verdict in his assassination help fuel the interest in his life.

But unlike President Kennedy, King was never a politician. He was a Baptist minister by training and vocation. But once he did such a fine job organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, he launched himself into the political arena by becoming the de facto leader of the American civil rights movement.



In other words, a man who had been trained as a religious pastor dedicated himself to breaking down the centuries old walls of segregation and discrimination in the South. And towards the end of his life, King had broadened his scope further. He spoke out in opposition to the Vietnam War and on the question of the distribution of wealth in America. A man trained in religion aimed his sights at political, social and economic goals.

Further, he refused to take any monetary gain for his efforts, even though his notoriety managed to bring millions of dollars to his cause. Because of all this, King has attained a status something like a secular saint in American culture, explaining why some of the books about him have religiously referenced titles e.g. David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross*, and Taylor Branch's trilogy: *Parting the Waters*, *Pillar of Fire* and *At Canaan's Edge*.

This aspect of King's career a kind of precursor to liberation theology is particularly accentuated because, unlike Malcolm X, King did not advocate or

threaten violence in his protest campaigns. In fact, under the influence of Bayard Rustin, King had studied the effectiveness of the non-violent crusades of Gandhi against the British Raj in India. And in 1959, he actually visited India to study how Gandhi had done his work. (*Martin Luther King Jr.: The FBI File*, by Michael Friedly and David Gallen, p. 20)

King's Origins

King was born into a middle-class family in Atlanta in 1929, coming from a line of local Baptist preachers. King's father practiced at the famous Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, a church that had a strong influence on the local civil rights movement. (James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, pgs. 20-22)

King's father was proud to be a member of the black middle-class. He liked to say that his children never lived in a rented house, and he never owned a car for very long with payments due. But at the age of six, little Martin was stunned when a white school friend of his told him he could not associate with him anymore since he was "a colored boy." (ibid, p. 23)

King went home and told his parents. They sat him down and explained the terrible and true facts about what whites had done to black Americans since slavery began. King recalled later that the question in his mind after this was, "How can I love a race of people who hate me?"

His parents said that whatever he felt about it was irrelevant. He could not hate the white race for the simple reason that he was a Christian. But his father also demonstrated to him that he did not have to take personal insults by turning the other cheek. King Sr. said, "When I stand up, I want everyone to know that a *man* is standing there." (ibid)

For instance, once when his father was stopped by a policeman, the officer told him, "Boy, show me your license." To which King Sr., replied by pointing at young Martin and saying, "That's a boy there. I'm, a man, I'm Reverend King." (ibid, p. 24) He later told his son, "Nobody can make a slave out of you if you don't think live a slave."

At Booker T. Washington High School, King first became known for his remarkable speaking abilities. On a return trip one night from an oratorical contest, the bus driver demanded that King and his teacher give up their seats near the front of the bus to some newly boarding whites. King did not want to comply. The driver then started cursing at them "and calling us black sons of bitches." (ibid, p. 25)

King still would not move. But his teacher said they had to obey the law. The two stood in the aisle for 90 miles from Valdosta to Atlanta. King never forgot

that humiliation. And he also added, "I don't think I have ever been so deeply angry in my life."

An Unlikely Course

King was such an exceptional student that he skipped two grades of high school. When local Morehouse College announced it would accept any high school student who could pass their entrance exam, King took them up on their offer. He graduated from Morehouse at age 19 in 1948, and enrolled at Crozier Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Moving north, King found out that racism in America was not confined to south of the Mason-Dixon line. At Crozier, King had a gun pulled on him by a white student from North Carolina who accused him of messing up his room. Another time, he and his friends were refused service at a restaurant in New Jersey. The owner then removed them from the establishment at gunpoint. When King tried to file charges, none of the white witnesses would agree to testify in court. (ibid, p. 28)

At Boston University, during his Ph. D. studies, King was exposed to Walter Rauschenbusch's classic 1907 book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. This was a seminal work of the Social Gospel movement. (ibid, p. 29) One of its most famous dictums is, "Whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood Jesus. Whoever sets any bounds for the reconstructive power of the religious life over the social relations and institutions of men, to that extent denies the faith of the Master." King now had the theological underpinnings to gird him for his career. This is why he always said he came to Gandhi through Jesus. (Garrow, p. 75)

King graduated from Boston University in 1955. He and his wife Coretta could have stayed in the Northeast. He was offered positions in New York and Massachusetts. (Cone, p. 32) Instead he chose the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, as his first posting. At first, King thought he would be a pastor for a few years and then step into the academic world and be a professor. (ibid, p. 33)

But in a colossal piece of serendipity, it was in that year and that place that both Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks were arrested for refusing to give up their bus seats to whites. The local civil rights leaders decided that the Parks incident was an ideal vehicle with which to challenge both the law and the Montgomery bus company. (Garrow, p. 16)

A Reluctant Leader

Contrary to popular belief, King did not step in and take over the Montgomery

movement. At first, he did not even want to get involved. He told his fellow minister, Ralph Abernathy, he would think over attending a local pastors' meeting. (ibid, p. 17)

Abernathy convinced King not to just attend, but to hold the meeting at his own church. As everyone knows, the success of the Montgomery bus boycott essentially created the civil rights movement. It also launched King's national career, and started the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was the fundraising and decision-making arm of the King/Abernathy organization.

What should not be forgotten is that this was a perfect example of a man growing into a moment. For example, during that year-long boycott, King visited a friend of his from the Crozier seminary. The friend later said he could barely recognize King from his college days. He said he had aged 20 years in just five. But further, "He wanders around in a daze, asking himself: Why has God seen fit to catapult me into such a situation." (Garrow, p. 76)

If ever there was an example of a stumbling into his great place in life, it was King. But as most commentators would agree, after the Montgomery boycott, the SCLC did not really come close to repeating that kind of spectacular success until Kennedy's inauguration. This was because, even though the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board* court decision in 1954 on school integration had been handed down during Dwight Eisenhower's presidency (and two other civil rights landmarks the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 also occurred during the Eisenhower administration), Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon were not deeply interested in advocating for or advancing civil rights.

Laws also are only effective if they are enforced. And the enforcement of these new rules was, at best, tepid under the GOP administration despite the notable exception of Eisenhower's intervention in the desegregation of schools in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. But the pace for change was about to accelerate.

A White House Ally

In October 1960, Sen. John Kennedy, the Democratic presidential nominee, told his civil rights advisory board that he would use the two legislative acts to break the back of voting discrimination in the South. (Harry Golden, *Mr. Kennedy and the Negroes*, p. 139)

This was a stark contrast to Eisenhower telling a reporter in 1956 that the *Brown* decision had set back progress in the South by at least 15 years. Or Nixon saying, "If the law goes further than public opinion can be brought along to support at a particular time, it may prove to do more harm than good." (ibid, p. 61)

Kennedy's promise of action, plus his intervention for King during the 1960 campaign while King was in jail, raised expectations once Kennedy was in office. By openly allying himself with King, Kennedy was giving the civil rights movement ballast and hope. So when Attorney General Robert Kennedy began to file segregation and voting rights cases under the dormant laws that Eisenhower and Nixon had neglected, something unforeseen happened: the civil rights movement began to broaden and act on its own on multiple fronts.

The movement finally had someone in the White House who had sympathy for them and with whom they had some influence. In his first memo to Kennedy on the subject, civil rights adviser Harris Wofford wrote that the problem with the civil rights cause was that there had been no real leadership in the Executive Branch or Congress to supplement the work of the courts.

So when President Kennedy began ordering integration and affirmative action in government positions and business contracts and altering the composition of the Civil Rights Commission and Robert Kennedy began hiring more civil rights lawyers and investigators and filing more and more state cases a synergy entered the calculus.

Soon, there was a powerful new momentum for racial justice. So much so that in June 1963, Kennedy made the clearest affirmation on the need for civil rights by a president in 100 years. He followed up by sending a new civil rights bill to Congress and then, in July, he made a surprise announcement at a press conference: He would back King's upcoming March on Washington in support of the bill. (Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept*, p. 114)

Political Battles

After Kennedy's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, Congress passed and President Lyndon Johnson signed into law much of Kennedy's civil rights bill with an emphasis on equal access to public places. But Johnson had stripped the act of an important voting rights aspect, since he thought it would be filibustered otherwise.

So there still needed to be further legislation on voting rights, which whites in parts of the Deep South staunchly opposed. One of those places was Alabama under the rule of segregationist Gov. George Wallace.

The voting rights battle would put King and civil rights activists back in the streets. Overall, there were four spectacular demonstrations that King was involved in: the Montgomery bus boycott, his showdown with police chief Bull Connor in Birmingham, his March on Washington and his face-off with Wallace and Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark in Selma in 1965. The last is the subject of the

new film *Selma* produced by Oprah Winfrey and Brad Pitt.

It's hard to believe considering the incredible historic drama around King's career that there have been few widely distributed movies either feature films or documentaries made about his life. In 1970, a cinema-verit -style documentary was produced for theaters by Ely Landau: *King: A Filmed Record from Montgomery to Memphis*. In 2004, PBS produced a more conventional documentary, *Citizen King*, which was a part of its *American Experience* series.

In 1978, writer-director Abby Mann made a three-night, 300-minute mini-series for NBC which starred Paul Winfield as King and Cicely Tyson as his wife. In 2001, HBO films produced a television movie called *Boycott* about the Montgomery movement, starring Jeffrey Wright as King and Terrence Howard as Abernathy. I have seen all of the above except the last (which, in fairness to it, is supposed to be the best.) To me, none of them really did justice to King, but the Mann mini-series was particularly poor.

Before addressing the current film, let us lay in the historical background about the Selma demonstrations. Alabama, because of George Wallace's high profile, had been a target of the civil rights movement for years. Young organizers like John Lewis and Jim Bevel had tried to organize voting rights drives there prior to 1965.

But the white power structure was not going to give black citizens the franchise, keeping blacks from the polls with devices such as the poll tax, the grandfather clause, and literacy tests. Showing how effective these tactics were, Alabama had an all-white state legislature. (Garrow, p. 371)

Further, though Selma was 57 percent black, only 130 African-Americans were registered to vote in 1964. In that year, Lewis had tried to register 50 blacks, but they were arrested. Afterwards, a state judge imposed an order saying any gathering of more than three people in public to discuss civil rights was against the law. This unconstitutional edict was clearly aimed at preventing civil rights activists from organizing mass demonstrations. (Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, p. 553)

Taking to the Streets

Prior to Jim Bevel convincing King to take on the challenge, the two main voter rights organizations in Selma, which was located in Dallas County, were the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Dianne Nash, a young volunteer, was a major force in SNCC. (Although she is portrayed in the film, her presence is minimal. And the husband/wife relationship between her and Bevel is not noted.)

As many historians have written, King was really the glue that kept the civil rights movement together for two reasons: first, his remarkable oratorical powers combined with his genial personality made him indispensable to the outreach of SCLC, and second, he did not present himself as a radical like Malcolm X or Stokely Carmichael. He could work with the politicians inside the system.

King also was in the center of the movement, with the NAACP on his right and groups like SNCC on his left. So, as the film depicts, when King decided on the Selma drive, some of those representing other factions did not welcome his, or the SCLC's, presence.

King decided to take on Selma because he noted some factors in his favor. First, the newly elected mayor was a moderate. His police chief, Wilson Baker, was also a relatively reasonable man. But the sheriff, Jim Clark, was another Bull Connor: an inveterate, violent racist determined to stop King.

Baker was planning to employ the soft-line tactics used so adroitly against the SCLC by Laurie Pritchett in Albany, Georgia. But King understood that the courthouse in Selma was under Clark's jurisdiction. So this is where the SCLC planned its first marches. The idea was to make Clark into another Connor: a symbol of the ugly, near-psychotic racism of the Old South and to use that image in the media to shame the consciences of Northern liberals.

This approach had worked to give Kennedy the votes he needed to submit his Civil Rights Act. The SCLC was going to use Clark and Selma to give Johnson the boost he needed to pass a Voting Rights Act. The fact that Clark had both Klansmen and National States Rights Party members on his force made this tactic naturally enticing.

The Battle Begins

Sheriff Clark controlled not just the courthouse square, but also the outlying areas. The SCLC understood the tactical importance of this division in duties as did police Chief Baker, who favored a less confrontational strategy. But Baker and the mayor could not overcome the stubbornness of the state police officers and Wallace, who had a lot invested in this conflict. In 1963, Wallace had been forcibly removed from the front gate of the University of Alabama when Kennedy enforced a court order to integrate the college. The governor did not want to suffer another public reversal.

In January 1965, the SCLC began with marches on the courthouse in order to get their people registered. Accompanied by the likes of Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell and states rights fanatic J. B. Stoner, Sheriff Clark escorted the

demonstrators to a nearby alley and said applicants would be registered one by one. (Garrow, pgs. 378-79) But that did not happen.

The next day, when the marchers arrived again, they refused to move to the alley as requested. When Clark forcibly removed them from the sidewalk, there was mild resistance. This quickly escalated into police brutality and mass arrests. The arrests were based on the previously mentioned ruling by the state judge. This repeated itself the next day. By that time, there were over 200 people in jail, including King. The SCLC paid for an ad in the *New York Times* saying that Clark had more people in the Selma jail than were registered to vote.

Since there were 60 newsmen on the scene, the media attention worked. President Johnson began to talk about both a voting rights bill and an amendment. Further, U.S. District Judge Daniel Thomas issued a restraining order barring Selma authorities from hindering applicants. But Clark would not let up. He arrested people with writs saying "charges to be named later". (Branch, p. 562)

When Annie Lee Cooper and others showed up the next day, Clark pushed some of the demonstrators. Cooper punched him. As the deputies threw her to the ground, she screamed up at Clark, "I wish you would hit me, you scum!" Clark did. And it made the front pages. (Garrow, p. 381. The film shows this incident, but strangely, her great line is not in the film.)

As more and more national attention focused on the confrontation, King began to direct the crusade from inside the jail. He asked for congressional visits, more of Johnson's intervention, and also for private citizens to join in from all areas of America.

Federal Judge Thomas issued another order, saying Selma must drop Alabama's difficult literacy test and at least 100 new applicants must be registered per day. Johnson made a public statement approving this new policy and endorsing the demonstrators' aims. (ibid, p. 385. LBJ's powerful statement is eliminated by the screenwriter, a revealing excision that I will return to later.)

The SCLC could have bailed King out of prison the first day. However, in order to heighten the tension, they didn't. When he did leave, he flew to Washington and met with Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Attorney General Nicolas Katzenbach and Johnson to discuss the specifics of a voting rights bill. (ibid, p. 387. Again, this is not in the film.)

An Expanding Confrontation

The demonstrations spread outside of Selma, to places like Camden and Marion. At night, in Marion which was under Clark's control newsman Richard Valeriani had his skull fractured and demonstrator Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot and killed.

Wallace then banned all nighttime protests and labeled the SCLC as “professional agitators with pro-Communist affiliations.” (ibid, p. 392)

In the wake of Jackson’s death and Wallace’s smear, the SCLC decided to cap the drive with a march to Montgomery from Selma, a distance of over 50 miles. King returned to Washington before the march and was told by Johnson that that he thought he could get the voting rights bill through. They also talked about protection for the march. (ibid, p. 395)

There ended up being three attempts at a march. King was absent from the first attempt which, as the film shows, was led by Hosea Williams and John Lewis. As the march crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, it was stopped by a large detachment of state troopers. They ordered the marchers back. When the marchers hesitated, they were attacked by batons, tear gas and troopers on horseback. In the background, white Southerners cheered the violence. Over 70 people went to the hospital, including Lewis. Police Chief Baker finally arrived at the scene to berate Sheriff Clark.

King led the second march. This time, he stopped in front of the troopers. Wallace had ordered the troopers to open up an alley for the procession to pass. (ibid, p. 404) But King did not utilize it. He led a chorus of “We Shall Overcome” and turned around.

That evening a group of three visiting Massachusetts ministers were attacked by white thugs. One, the Reverend James J. Reeb of Boston suffered a blow to the skull from which he later died. Johnson issued a statement condemning the violence and said he was writing a bill on voting rights. He would address Congress himself on the issue. (ibid, p. 405) He did so, and most believe he gave the best speech of his life, echoing the words, “We shall overcome.”

For the final march, Gov. Wallace said he could not guarantee the demonstrators’ safety, so Johnson mobilized the National Guard under the direction of the Justice Department. The march proceeded successfully and King made a powerful speech in Montgomery, but not before there was one more death, Viola Liuzzo, a Northerner who came to Selma at King’s urging. She was transporting some of the SCLC marchers back and forth during the procession and was killed by a Klan member.

The Movie’s Narrative

The movie *Selma* begins with King dressing to accept the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. We then cut to the bombing of four young black girls in Birmingham, murders that actually occurred the year before, after Kennedy’s submission of his civil rights bill. To me, this was an acceptable use of dramatic license, since it

showed that even though King was being honored abroad, there was still much violence awaiting the movement at home.

We then move to Selma where Annie Lee Cooper is being denied the right to vote by a registrar because she cannot name all 67 judges in Alabama. Next, the SCLC begins to move into Selma in preparation for the crusade. We watch as one of Nazi Rockwell's henchmen punches King in the lobby of a (now integrated) hotel.

Throughout the film, director Ava DuVernay posts facsimiles of FBI teletypes showing the surveillance that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was conducting on King. The FBI file on King went back as far as 1958 (Friedly and Gallen, p. 110), and it was greatly intensified in 1962 when King criticized Hoover about the lack of protection the FBI was giving civil rights workers.

The ultra-sensitive FBI Director promptly retaliated by calling a news conference and calling King the most notorious liar in America. (ibid, p. 43) Although there was an attempt at public reconciliation, it was only done for public appearances. Hoover's resentment toward King persisted until King's death and some would say beyond that.

Hoover's effort to destroy King culminated in the manufacture of a so-called "suicide package," a message telling King that he was a "complete fraud" and a "moral imbecile." After two paragraphs of insults and invective, the letter said King's end was approaching and "you are done," repeating that phrase three times.

The letter concluded with: "there is only one thing for you to do. You know what that is. . . . There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation." (Garrow, p. 373)

Enclosed with the letter was an audiotape of King telling some bawdy jokes and making some unkind comments about some friends and public figures. There were also the sounds purportedly of King engaging in sex with other women besides his wife. The film depicts Coretta King playing the tape for her husband but does not include the letter, whose absence is symptomatic of a serious failing of the film.

By not having the letter read verbatim, DuVernay passes up what surely would have been a dramatic highlight. But it also dilutes just how vicious the battle was between Hoover, King and the civil rights movement. Further, Hoover is barely depicted in the film. When he is, he is played by Dylan Baker, who does not resemble him and is not made up to look like him.

Misunderstood Role

And in Hoover's one scene, screenwriter Paul Webb portrays the FBI Director as some kind of efficient civil servant who reports to President Johnson on the surveillance and intelligence that he has on King. This is simply not accurate. In addition to the aforementioned "suicide package," during the time frame of the film, Hoover tried to get the business and political leaders of Atlanta not to follow through on a dinner to honor their most famous citizen.

Hoover also tried to prevent King from getting an audience at the Vatican. (Branch, pgs. 483, 569) By all accounts, these maneuvers had a serious deleterious psychological effect on King. He was deeply troubled that, one day, he would wake up and see these accusations splashed across the front page of a major newspaper, which is what Hoover tried to do on more than one occasion.

But, for some reason, screenwriter Webb and director DuVernay decided to leave almost all of this out. Instead, they do something just as inexplicable: They transfer the animus and obstructionism from Hoover to Johnson.

Johnson historian Mark Updegrave has complained about this inaccuracy. If anything he is too mild. For instance, the film clearly implies that the celebrated "suicide package" was sent to the SCLC Atlanta office because Hoover was abiding by Johnson's wishes. In other words, it was a joint venture to stop King's Selma drive.

In no account that I have read of this despicable act is there even the pretense for this being accurate, including the Church Committee Report where it first surfaced, down through the two leading biographies of King by Branch and Garrow, and even books which focus on this very subject, that is the campaign by Hoover against King.

At the time depicted in the film, Johnson was actually on friendly terms with King. On the eve of the Selma drive, he called King for some advice on presidential appointments. (Branch, p. 560) It's true that when King met with Johnson on his return from Oslo, Johnson told him that he did not think he had the votes to pass a Voting Rights Act.

As Andrew Young recalled, when King told him about this, Young asked what they should do in that case. King replied that they had to get the power for Johnson, which was one reason the Selma campaign began. (op. cit. Updegrave)

Further, unlike what the film depicts, Johnson did not need to call Hoover in to be briefed on what the FBI had on King because Hoover voluntarily would send Johnson reports on this activity. He did this for the same reason he sent the material to Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Hoover was trying to drive a wedge between these two national leaders and King. (Branch, p. 545)

The film also discounts the real reason that King passed up the chance to go through the opening left by Sheriff Clark on the second attempt to march to Montgomery. Johnson and his aides had been working with the federal judge to hold a hearing so that he could legally provide protection for the marchers.

King wanted to march before that hearing was held. So Johnson sent in a team of mediators, among them Kennedy's civil rights lawyer John Doar, to negotiate a truce so that no one would get hospitalized again. The film only shows this very briefly and it does not make clear Johnson's role in it.

To be sure, there was a falling-out between King and Johnson. But this occurred later after King began to rail against the administration for shortchanging the War on Poverty while spending billions of dollars on the Vietnam War. But that break occurred in 1967 when King made his blistering speech against the war in New York City.

No one has more disdain for President Johnson than I do for reversing so many of Kennedy's policies, but voting rights was not an example of this. And, therefore, this is not a legitimate use of dramatic license.

It is instructive to compare the depiction of Hoover in this film with his portrayal in Mario Van Peebles' 1995 *Panther*. That was an accurate and honest portrayal of what Hoover's FBI did through its COINTELPRO attacks to decimate the Black Panther movement. That much-ignored film much more honestly than *Selma* depicts Hoover's role against the civil rights movement.

Other Shortcomings

Beyond that cheap shot against Johnson, *Selma* has other shortcomings. It contains most of the conflicts that occurred during the voting rights campaign and those moments presented remarkable opportunities in cinematic terms. I wish I could say DuVernay was up to them. But in my view, the direction, editing, and music scoring were all pretty much conventional and prosaic.

In fact, from what I have seen of HBO's *Boycott*, that television film holds its own technically and aesthetically with *Selma*. This film, with a more capable director, would have had much more brio and fire to it.

And this criticism extends to the acting. The best I can say about the major performances is that they were adequate, including Tim Roth as Wallace, Tom Wilkinson as Johnson, Carmen Ejogo as Coretta and David Oyelowo as King. With these kinds of roles at hand and with so much archival material available the director should have pushed the performers into the very breath of their characters, such as has occurred in other historical movies, i.e., Daniel Day-Lewis as Lincoln and Jack Nicholson as Jimmy Hoffa.

To put it mildly, I never got that feeling watching the film. In fact, the best performance in the film is by Oprah Winfrey as Annie Lee Cooper. She really understood and planned her character, and then got to the outer reaches of sensitivity to empathize with her. For me the best scene in the film is the early one with Cooper being denied her voting rights and much of that quality is due to Winfrey's acting.

And finally, the film passed up a real opportunity to add some electricity to the film. During the crusade in Selma, Malcolm X had a speaking engagement in nearby Tuskegee and was invited by two SCLC workers to visit Selma. He appeared at a press conference, met with staff members, gave a speech, and talked to the wives of King and Abernathy. Pretty much all we see of this is the last.

In my opinion, this would have been a great opportunity to dramatize the splits in the civil rights movement, to contrast Malcolm with King, and to show how Malcolm was not changing his approach and he was beginning to play a "good cop/bad cop" routine with King. Meaning that, if you don't give this American Gandhi what he wants, you will have to deal with me.

The film ends with King giving his speech in Selma and captions denoting progress made that, for example, Andrew Young went on to be voted mayor of Atlanta twice and John Lewis a long-term congressman.

The film is supposed to be a commemoration of a long and brutal struggle, as well as a distillation of a great man. In this writer's opinion because of the script's biases and the director's lack of inspiration and imagination it does not do justice to its subject. We should have felt like we were being forced to the ground and pounded by Clark's baton. We should have been shaking with rage at Wallace's plotting in the state house. Most of all, we should have been outraged at Hoover's attempts to break King's spirit.

The film doesn't do these things. Therefore, I still await a picture that does justice to the great subject of Martin Luther King.

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

Behind the USS Liberty Cover-up

For decades, Israel has exercised strong influence over U.S. policies in the Mideast via its highly effective Washington lobby, but that power was tested in

1967 when Israeli warplanes strafed the USS Liberty killing 34 American crewmen, an incident revisited in a new documentary reviewed by Maidhc Ó Cathail.

By Maidhc Ó Cathail

"The Day Israel Attacked America," an investigation into Israel's deadly June 8, 1967 attack on the USS Liberty at the height of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, was aired recently on Al Jazeera America.

Directed by British filmmaker Richard Belfield, the documentary confirms not only that the attack on the U.S. Navy spy ship was deliberate, an undisputed fact long accepted by all but the most shameless Israeli apologists, but reveals, perhaps for the first time, how Tel Aviv was able to induce the U.S. government to cover up an attack that killed 34 and injured 171 of its own seamen by a supposed "ally."

"It was especially tough for Lyndon Johnson, to date the most pro-Israeli American president in history," the film's narrator observed. According to Tom Hughes, the State Department's director of intelligence and research at the time of the Liberty attack, "Johnson was in a very tough mood."

As an indication of Johnson's initial firm stance, Hughes recalled that Johnson briefed Newsweek magazine off the record that the Israelis had attacked the Liberty, suggesting that they may have done so because they believed that the naval intelligence-gathering ship had been intercepting Israeli as well as Egyptian communications.

A post-interview leak revealing that it was the President himself who had briefed the media about the attack on the Liberty alarmed the Israeli embassy in Washington and its friends in the major Jewish organizations, who intimated that Johnson's Newsweek briefing "practically amounted to blood libel."

The documentary's narrator said declassified Israeli documents now show that "they were going to threaten President Johnson with 'blood libel', gross anti-Semitism, and that would end his political career."

"Blackmail!" retired U.S. Navy admiral Bobby Ray Inman frankly summed up Israel's strategy to deal with Johnson. "[T]hey know if he is thinking about running again he's going to need money for his campaign," said Inman, who from 1977 to 1981 directed the National Security Agency, the U.S. intelligence agency under whose aegis the USS Liberty had been dispatched to the eastern Mediterranean. "So alleging that he's blood-libeling is going to arouse the Jewish donors."

The Israeli government hired teams of lawyers, including close friends of Johnson, the narrator added, and began an "all-out offensive" to influence media coverage of the attack, leaning on them "to kill critical stories" and slant others in Israel's favor.

"There was a campaign mounted to see what could be done about returning Johnson to his normal, predictable pro-Israeli position," Hughes said. "Efforts were to be made to remind the President of the delicacy of his own position, that he personally might lose support for his run for reelection in 1968."

Israelis Bearing Gifts

Noting the cleverness of Israel's tactics, the documentary revealed that after having identified the Vietnam War as Johnson's "soft spot" it quietly provided him with "two extraordinary gifts."

The first addressed the President's bitterness toward many American Jewish organizations and community leaders over their opposition to his Vietnam policy. But as the Liberty crisis unfolded, Hughes said, "they were suddenly becoming more silent on Vietnam." Johnson was made to understand that taking a more "moderate" position toward Israel over the attack would benefit him politically.

The second gift was a vital military one. The U.S. military attaché in Tel Aviv received a surprise visit. "I think I have something you might be interested in," a senior Israeli intelligence officer told him. The Israelis had just crossed the Red Sea to capture the Egyptian military's Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missiles, the same ones the North Vietnamese were using to bring down American aircraft on a daily basis.

As a show of gratitude, the U.S. government gave the Israelis two gifts in return. The Johnson administration resupplied them with the weapons they had used in their six-day land grab of territory from Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The White House also decided to water down the Defense Department's inquiry into the attack on the Liberty.

As Hughes explained, "Soon Johnson did respond, and took a much more lenient line and wished that the whole incident could be put behind us as soon as possible."

Johnson's "softer approach" to Israel was reflected in the U.S. Navy inquiry then underway onboard the Liberty. As one of the survivors recalled, the Liberty's crew began to realize that "a cover-up was descending" upon them. Among key testimony ignored was the strafing of the Liberty's deck with napalm and the machine-gunning of the sinking ship's lifeboats.

Without interviewing any Israelis involved in the attack, the U.S. court of inquiry rushed out a report, hurriedly completed in a mere 20 days, exonerating Israel from blame. Tel Aviv quickly followed up with its own report that concluded that the whole incident was “a series of mistakes, and that no one was to blame.”

Ignoring a secret telegram from its ambassador in Washington advising that Tel Aviv admit its guilt in light of America’s possession of an incriminating audio tape of the attack, Israel instead shifted its focus to repairing the damage to its relationship with the U.S.

“The Israelis have always been very skillful at tracking what the U.S. government is doing, saying, thinking, and effort[s] to influence it,” Inman pointed out. “And the great advantage they have as compared to other countries is their influence on the Congress.”

A timely Washington Post report noted that “the Jewish lobby could help determine the outcome of 169 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House.”

As Johnson considered his re-election prospects, Hughes said the “emotive” language used in earlier Pentagon press releases disappeared and was replaced by “a much more bland and neutral-sounding discourse.”

“But whatever was said to journalists,” the narrator added, “every U.S. intelligence head believed that the attack was intentional.” As one of them colorfully wrote at the time, “a nice whitewash for a group of ignorant, stupid and inept xxxxxxxx.” Though shown but not mentioned in the film, the next sentence of the intelligence chief’s letter stated the obvious: “If the attackers had not been Hebrew there would have been quite a commotion.”

“The Jewish community has always been more generous than many of their other counterparts in supporting financially elections, political causes,” Inman observed. “In the process, that does translate into influence.”

Israel’s White House Friends

Israel’s influence inside the White House was even more significant. “Many of Johnson’s closest friends and advisors were pro-Israeli, and they reported back to Tel Aviv on his every move,” the film asserted.

If anything, this understated Israeli influence. As Grace Halsell, a staff writer for Johnson, later wrote, “Everyone around me, without exception, was pro-Israel.”

Thanks to its supporters surrounding Johnson, the narrator claimed that the Israeli government was able to constantly shift its story “to counter whatever new intelligence the White House received.”

To protect their contacts’ identity, the Israelis used codenames in their communications with them. “The Day Israel Attacked America,” however, revealed for the first time the identities of four of these pro-Israeli eyes and ears inside the Johnson administration.

“Hamlet” was Abe Feinberg, one of the most influential fundraisers ever in Democratic Party politics, whose phone calls Johnson couldn’t afford to ignore; “Menashe” was Arthur Goldberg, the U.S ambassador to the United Nations; “Harari” was David Ginsberg, a prominent Washington lawyer who represented the Israeli embassy; and “Ilan” was Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, a longtime Johnson confidant who had dined with the President on the eve of the Six-Day War.

It would hardly be an overstatement to say that the President owed his political career to “Ilan”/Fortas. As biographer Robert A. Caro has written, Johnson “largely through the legal genius of his ally Abe Fortas, managed, by a hairbreadth, to halt a federal court’s investigation into the stealing of the 1948 election,” in a reference to LBJ’s first Senate race.

According to the documentary, it was “Menashe”/Goldberg who supplied Israel with the key intelligence. Goldberg warned the Israelis that the U.S. had an audio tape that confirmed the Israeli pilots knew the Liberty was an American ship before they attacked.

“The strategy worked,” concluded Belfield’s documentary. “The U.S.-Israeli relationship proved to be stronger than the killing and injuring of more than 200 Americans.”

But it wasn’t always a foregone conclusion. As Hughes put it, “The American-Israeli relationship was very much at stake, and it was brought back from the precipice.”

“The Day Israel Attacked America” ends with a scene of surviving veterans of the USS Liberty laying a wreath on their murdered comrades’ memorial headstone and a prescient observation by the U.S. undersecretary of state at the time of the attack.

“It seemed clear to the Israelis that as American leaders did not have the courage to punish them for the blatant murder of American citizens,” George Ball noted, “they would let them get away with anything.”

Maidhc Ó Cathail is a widely published writer and political analyst. He is also the creator and editor of The Passionate Attachment blog, which focuses primarily on the U.S.-Israeli relationship.

The Battle for Palestine – Part Two

Special Report: After the Holocaust, Europe acquiesced to the Zionist settlement of Palestine and turned a blind eye to the ethnic cleansing that cleared Arabs from the land, as ex-U.S. diplomat William R. Polk describes in the second of a three-part series.

By William R. Polk

The British Foreign Secretary told Parliament on Feb. 18, 1947, that “there is no prospect of resolving this conflict by any settlement negotiated between the parties.” Further, he said, according to the League of Nations mandate, the legal basis for Britain’s rule over Palestine, Britain did not have the authority to partition the country as everyone thought would be necessary.

Thus, the British government had decided to turn the problem over to the United Nations. The Foreign Secretary did not mention, but it was obviously a significant factor, that Britain could no longer afford to keep nearly 100,000 troops employed in an increasingly vain effort to keep the peace in what was in comparison to India a relatively unimportant area.

In response to Britain’s request, the UN Secretary General on April 2, 1947, asked that the General Assembly (UNGA) take up the question of what should be done about Palestine. Five of the member states thought they already knew what to do: Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia proposed “The termination of the Mandate over Palestine and the declaration of its independence.” Their motion was rejected by the UNGA which instead, voted to establish a “Special Committee for Palestine” (UNSCOP) to recommend a different solution.

It should have been sobering to the members of this, the last in the long line of inquiries, to hear the British delegate say, “We have tried for years to solve the problem of Palestine. Having failed so far, we now bring it to the United Nations, in the hope that it can succeed where we have not. If the United Nations can find a just solution which will be accepted by both parties, [we would] welcome such a solution [but] we should not have the sole responsibility for enforcing a solution which is not accepted by both parties and which we cannot reconcile with our conscience.”

UNSCOP was to be composed of a diverse group, representatives of Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay and Yugoslavia. As diverse as the committee was, its members shared one characteristic: none of them knew anything about Palestine. And they could not expect that they would get a "balanced" view since the representative of one party, the Palestinians, decided to abstain from collaboration with UNSCOP.

In the absence of a Palestinian voice combined with the general ignorance of the members of the Committee and sporadic demonstrations in Palestine against its inquiry the Jewish Agency dominated the proceedings.

Seeking Balance

Despite these problems, UNSCOP set out, or at least signed, a generally fair and informative appreciation of "the Elements of the Conflict" in its *Report to The General Assembly*. In summary, it portrayed two populations, one European, technologically advanced, united and determined, numbering about 600,000, and the other, numbering 1,200,000, Asian, divided both religiously and geographically into about 1,200 self-reliant, self-governing communities as well as "native quarters" of the few cities, suffering from all of the inherited problems of colonialism.

This population lived in one small (26,000 square kilometer/10,000 square mile) area of which "about half ... is uninhabitable desert" with seasonal and limited rainfall and access to ground water only from fragile and (what ultimately have proven to be) endangered aquifers. Palestine was almost totally without minerals other than the potassium and sodium salts of the Dead Sea. The delegates must have thought there was little to divide.

UNSCOP accepted as given, probably on legal advice, that it should work within the intent and functioning of the League of Nations mandate. In retrospect curiously, UNSCOP did not apparently consider the utility of negotiating with and between the Palestinians and the Zionists. Nor, as in various contemporary and subsequent instances of decolonization did it regard the majority community as the presumed legal heir to the colonial government. Only the Arab states thought of turning the "case" over to the International Court.

Viewing the mandate document as tantamount to a constitution for Palestine, UNSCOP emphasized that the Mandatory Power (Britain) had been obliged to "secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home," to "facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions" and to "encourage, in co-operation with the Jewish Agency ... close settlement by Jews on the land" while it "speaks in general terms only of safeguarding or not prejudicing the 'civil and religious rights' and the 'rights and position' of the Arab community in Palestine."

In attempting to balance these unequal obligations, the Committee observed, the "Mandatory Power has attempted, within the limits of its interpretation of the 'dual obligation' of the mandate, to provide some satisfaction of Arab political desires," but such moves "were generally rejected by the Palestinians and vigorously opposed by the Zionists."

UNSCOP was told that the Zionists demanded the right of "return" for European Jews in numbers defined only by the "economic absorptive capacity of the state." The Zionist representatives declared, however, that "The immigrant Jews [would] displace no Arabs, but rather [would] develop areas which otherwise would remain undeveloped."

Promises of Peace

In an earlier communication (March 19, 1899) to an official of the Ottoman Empire, Theodore Herzl had written that the Zionist movement was "completely peaceful and very content if they are left in peace. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing to fear from their immigration. ... Your Excellency sees another difficulty, in the existence of the non-Jewish population in Palestine. But who would think of sending them away? It is their well-being, their individual wealth which we will increase by bringing in our own."

The basis of the Zionist claim to Palestine was, as from the beginning of the movement in Theodore Herzl's words, "Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home."

In a separate opinion, the Representative of India held that the Jewish contention that they were the "original" natives was both historically questionable and, if held to be the basis of a legal claim, would be a recipe for chaos since virtually all modern states would be open to similar claims based on ancient history.

As he wrote, "To found their claim on their dispersion from Palestine after a period of approximately 2,000 years, whatever religious sentiment may be attached by them to the land occupied by their Prophets, appears to me to be as groundless as anything can be. A multitude of nations conquered various countries at various times and were eventually defeated and turned out of them. Can their connexion, however long, with the land which they had once conquered provide them with any basis after the lapse of even one century?"

"If this were so, Moslems might claim Spain, which they governed for a much longer period than the Jews had governed part of Palestine ... [moreover] this claim cannot be made by those who were subsequently converted to Judaism. Khazars of Eastern Europe, Turco-Finn by race, were converted to Judaism as a

nation about 690 A.D. Can their descendants possibly claim any rights simply because the ancestors of their co-religionists had once settled in Palestine.”

There is no indication that UNSCOP as a whole reacted to the Indian delegate’s demarche. But it was, in part, foreshadowed by the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee which “postulate[d] the ‘natural’ right of the Arab majority to remain in undisputed possession of the country, since they are and have been for many centuries in possession...”

The Arab Higher Committee also made two further arguments: first, that “the term ‘Arab’ is to be interpreted as connoting not only the invaders from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, but also the indigenous population which intermarried with the invaders and acquired their speech, customs and modes of thought in becoming permanently Arabized.”

It is the descendants of this mixed group, they said, who the current Palestinian “natives.” And, second, they claimed “acquired” rights, which derived from the various British promises during and immediately after the First World War. Thus, the Palestinians “have persistently adhered to the position that the Mandate for Palestine, which incorporated the Balfour Declaration, is illegal.”

Disputing Arab Claims

UNSCOP found the Arab claims weak. It held that the Palestinian claim to “natural” rights is flawed by the fact that “they have not been in possession of it [Palestine] as a sovereign nation ... [and] Palestinian nationalism, as distinct from Arab nationalism, is itself a relatively new phenomenon.”

Moreover, Great Britain “has consistently denied that Palestine was among the territories to which independence was pledged.” Finally, the Committee noted that the 1936 Royal Commission had pointed out that “there was a time when Arab statesmen were willing to consider giving Palestine to the Jews, provided that the rest of Arab Asia was free. That condition was not fulfilled then, but it is on the eve of fulfilment [sic] now.”

UNSCOP admitted that “the Jews would displace Arabs from the land if restrictions were not imposed ... [And found that since this] would seem inevitable ... continued development of the Jewish National Home ... envisages the possibility of a violent struggle with the Arabs.” It concluded by quoting Lord Balfour saying that “The general lines of [the Balfour Declaration] policy stand and must stand.”

So, UNSCOP recommended that following the British withdrawal, there should be a short interval during which time Palestine and the incipient Jewish state would

be held under some sort of trusteeship while Palestine would be prepared to be partitioned into two states that would continue to be unified economically.

Meanwhile, the living circumstances of 250,000 or so displaced European Jews would be alleviated. The Committee ducked the question of whether or not that meant that the Displaced Persons would be allowed to enter Palestine. Finally, it noted that violence, carried out until recently "almost exclusively" by "underground Jewish organizations" would "render increasingly difficult the execution of the solution to be agreed upon by the United Nations." But it offered no means to lessen the violence or to avoid the likelihood of war.

After reviewing the reports, listening to emotional appeals by various delegates, individuals and groups and following orders transmitted by their home governments, the delegates to the UN General Assembly voted (Resolution 181) on Nov. 29, 1947, 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions, despite strong opposition by Arab member states, to recommend partition of Palestine. The key feature was that it awarded the incipient Jewish state, whose citizens-to-be owned or controlled less than 6 percent of the land, 55 percent of the Mandate.

On the Ground in Palestine

The General Assembly had issued its verdict but it left open the question of how to actually carry out the resolution when no UN-controlled military or police forces were available. As the British delegate warned the General Assembly, Britain's "84,000 troops were leaving. And they had proved insufficient to maintain law and order, in the face of a campaign of terrorism waged by highly organised Jewish forces equipped with all the weapons of the modern infantryman."

To appreciate the full meaning of the UN General Assembly decision, I consider it in the context of in four interacting categories:

First, the British military force began to disengage not only overall but selectively from cities, towns and camps. As it did, it opened areas that became essentially free-fire zones. The British commander reasonably took the position that his priority was to keep his soldiers out of harm's way. They should be evacuated as quickly and as safely as possible.

What happened after they had left, or even what happened during the process of their leaving, was not their responsibility. Thus, as they vacated their former positions, one at a time, they necessarily if inadvertently favored one side or the other. Where they could, they tried to protect the residents; thus, for example in the city of Tiberias, they evacuated the nearly half of the residents who were Palestinians. Thus, they acted to protect the Palestinians but

effectively turned the city over to the Jews. Overall, their actions necessarily favored the Zionists.

Second, the Arab states loudly and repeatedly proclaimed the responsibility to protect the Palestinians. However, until after the legal end to the Palestine mandate, they could not intervene. Doing so would have constituted an act of war against Britain, and the British would not allow them to move. So in the months between the beginning of the British withdrawal and May 15, 1948, they were effectively immobilized.

Legality was not the only reason. There were two other reasons for the inactivity of the Arab states. The first reason for their inactivity was that they were weak. Egypt and Iraq were effectively under British military occupation since their abortive revolts against the British (Iraq in 1941 and Egypt in 1942), and their armed forces were kept small, disorganized and ill-equipped. Corruption sapped their logistics while purges of officers suspected of political ambition or nationalist ardor weakened their command structures.

When the Iraqi army was sent to Palestine, many of its soldiers were not adequately armed, and some were without uniforms or even suitable footwear. The Egyptian army was the butt of British jokes it was said to be the largest army in the world, judged by the girth of the officers. They were scorned as inferior colonials. The army had only cast-off British equipment. Morale was naturally low.

The only reasonably effective Arab military force was the Jordanian Legion which had been designed to patrol the desert and to provide income for Bedouin tribesmen who were its recruits. It was composed of only four battalions and one (as yet untrained) artillery unit. It had no transport and little ammunition. Moreover, it was not a "national" force: it was under the command of British officers.

No Effective Leaders

None of the Arab governments was an effective leader in its own country. King Farouk was generally despised by educated Egyptians; the mass of Egyptians lived on the edge of starvation; Egypt was already a "country of crowds" with roughly 1,000 people on each square kilometer of inhabitable land; disease was common and life expectancy was short.

Like the Egyptians, the Iraqis had troubles of their own. And they thought their governments were a big part of their troubles. The King of Iraq was a little boy who was under the control of a much hated regent who was regarded as a puppet of the British. Only Trans-Jordan's Amir Abdullah seemed popular among his mainly

Bedouin subjects.

The second inhibition was that the leaders of the Arab states were divided by personal ambitions. Each pursued his own goals. King Farouk's Egypt wanted to take over at least Gaza to anchor the Sinai Peninsula while Abdullah had secretly worked with the Zionists for years to get their support for his incorporation of "Arab Palestine." Neither he nor Farouk were interested in the Palestinians.

Farouk confiscated military equipment destined for Abdullah. Each ruler espoused a different Palestinian faction. In short, jealousies, ambitions and personal quarrels were of much more importance to them than their declared protection of the Palestinians. Thus, the Arab states had no unified strategy and did not seek, even separately, to work with such forces as the Palestinians mustered.

Realizing their incapacity, the Arab states got the Arab League to offer on March 21, 1948, two months before the Mandate was due to lapse, a compromise peace. They offered to take in the thousands of Jewish "illegals," whom the British were holding on Cyprus, as citizens of their countries and urged that, rather than being divided as the UN had voted, the whole Mandate area be put once again under a trusteeship.

That proposal was briefly considered by the U.S. government which realized that a dangerous and destructive war, which was likely to harm American interests, was inevitable if the UN decision were implemented. The American "retreat" infuriated American Zionists who mounted a political attack on the Truman Administration, with articles in *The New York Times* castigating officials for "duplicity," "shoddy and underhand turnabout" and "a shocking reversal."

The Truman Administration quickly backed down. What the Administration did was a replay of the Feb. 14, 1931 British Government disavowal of its White Paper, based on the Hope-Simpson Report, that would have limited Jewish immigration.

A Weak Military

Third, the Palestinian cause attracted volunteer fighters – a category of combatants we see in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq – who began to infiltrate the Mandate before the British left. Some of them were displaced Palestinians who had been in exile since they had fought against the British in the 1936-1938 "revolt." Most were from other Arab countries. They are believed to have numbered about a thousand by the end of 1947 and rose to perhaps 3,000 in the next year.

How effective these volunteers were is in doubt. Some carried out terrorist acts, particularly against Zionist targets in the area the UN had designated as

the Arab Palestinian state, but the record shows that while they were brave, they were not decisive. In the village structure of Palestine, they were alien. In some villages which still sought to remain neutral, they were unwelcome.

Overall, the Palestinians had little military capacity. The intelligence agents of the Jewish Agency had been monitoring the Palestinians for years and reported in detail on their arms, organizations and sources of supply: they reported that the Palestinians had no arms production capability except in primitive bombs, few and mostly antiquarian rifles, usually with only 20-50 bullets a gun, practically no heavier weapons, no mortars, no machineguns, no artillery, no armored vehicles and no aircraft – their only potential source of supply, Britain, embargoed arms sales to them.

Perhaps even more important, they had no cadres of trained troops, no staff, no planning and no command-and-control organization. Perhaps most important, they had no intelligence sources in the Jewish community. Their only significant military leader was killed on April 8, 1948.

Villages operated independently and so, as the Israeli military intelligence reports confirm, "Villages in 1948 often fought – and fell – alone, the Haganah was able to pick them off one at a time in many districts. In many areas there was not even defensive co-operation between neighbouring villages, since relations between them, as often as not, were clouded by clan and family feuds."

In short, the Palestinians had no significant military capacity. They were a typical colonial society. Already before May 1948, they had suffered at least 5,000 casualties. While the Israelis talked of the threat of an Arab-inflicted holocaust, "They were fully aware that the Arab war rhetoric was in no way matched by any serious preparation on the ground."

Hidden Realities

Fourth, in every category, the Zionists had overwhelming superiority. Since much of the information in this section was sternly denied for years I have checked what I have collected against the two major and more recent Israeli accounts, both of which were derived from Israeli military and political archives.

For years honest discussion of the Palestinian refugee issue was virtually impossible in print – being almost certain either or both to get the historian labeled as an anti-Semite or to cause his books to be effectively banned in book stores. (Both happened to me.)

It came as a “bomb shell” in 1987 when the Israeli journalist, Benny Morris, published *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. He had been given access to the Israeli archives – the first time ever – and used them to document, at least partially, the Israeli expulsion of the Palestinians.

In 2004, in a second edition of his book, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, he took a less neutral position on the issues he had discussed. Morris had set out his contention that “The Palestine refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterised the first Israeli-Arab war.”

Other Israeli scholars, notably Ilan Pappé in his 2006 book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, expanded, corrected and developed the research of Morris. Pappé shows conclusively that what Morris saw as more or less accidental – the exodus of the Palestinian people – was a strategy inherent in Zionism from the beginning and implemented deliberately, brutally and effectively according to what in the Israeli archives is known as “Plan D” (*Tochnit Dalet*).

I have drawn extensively on both books for this part of my essay because, drawn as they are on Israeli government and army sources, they are incontrovertible. I have, of course, drawn also on a variety of other, including British official, sources.

A Longstanding Plan

From Ottoman times, the Jewish community, the *Yishuv*, had thought of itself as a proto-government and from the establishment of the League of Nations Mandate “all institutions were built with an eye to conversions into institutions of state.”

The British government dealt with and recognized the “Jewish Agency” as a *de facto* government which is how the *Yishuv* regarded it. Thus, it was able to make decisions that would be carried out. It had departments headed by ministers under a leader, David Ben-Gurion, who was virtually a head of state.

The *Yishuv* was literate, highly motivated, relatively wealthy and able also to draw upon European and American financial, political and personnel support. In short, it was a modern Western society and one with a multi-state capability.

The *Yishuv* had long had an agreed strategy: from the late Nineteenth Century, the Zionist leaders worked toward making Palestine into a *Judenstaat*. While in public, they disguised their long-term objective, using the subterfuge homeland (*heimstättte*), among themselves their aim was never in doubt. There was never, in private communications, serious consideration of either a bi-national state

in which Arabs would also live or a smaller state in a partitioned Palestine.

At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the Zionists claimed the southern part of what became Lebanon and most of the agricultural area of what became Trans-Jordan as well as the major sources of water for the Mandate area. Trans-Jordan was divided from the Mandate of Palestine in 1922 to resolve the dilemma created by the French when they invaded Syria and overthrew its newly proclaimed independence.

The brother of the deposed ruler of Syria, Amir Abdullah, had marched into what became Trans-Jordan intending to fight the French. To stop him, the British in effect bought him off by establishing him in Amman. The British also asserted that this action would honor the commitments made to the Arabs to recognize their independence. Jordan was not to be subject to the Balfour Declaration and Jews were forbidden to buy land there.

Ben-Gurion's Strategy

The basic element of Zionist strategy was spelled out by the Zionist leader, David Ben-Gurion just after the publication of the Royal Commission Report in 1937 when he wrote privately to his son, "We must expel [the Palestinian] Arabs and take their places ... and if we have to use force – not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places – then we have force at our disposal."

The force at the disposal of the *Yushiv* began to be established in 1920 when the collectives (Hebrew: *kibbutzim*) set up semi-formal and part-time security guards units (Hebrew: *HaShomer*). In 1936, in response to the Arab nationalist revolt, the British enrolled some 5,000 Jews into what became the paramilitary wing of the Jewish community. This evolved into the Haganah that would evolve into the Israel Defense Force.

Under a British military expert, the soldiers were trained in guerrilla and counterinsurgency warfare. In what may have been the first punitive mission against a Palestinian village – a kind of tactic the British had long used in India and along the Northwest Frontier to suppress nationalist revolts – a joint British-Haganah expedition in June 1938 attacked a Palestinian village on the Lebanese border.

During the early part of the Second World War, when a German break-through appeared likely, the British enrolled, trained and equipped Jewish military formations and incorporated individual Jews into its Middle East intelligence organization. By about 1942, some 15,000 men were serving in the British army in some capacity. In addition, fearing what might happen if the British were unable

to hold off Erwin Romel's *Deutsches Afrikakorps*, the Jewish Agency in 1941 formed a "special forces" corps or shock troops known as Palmach (Hebrew: *p'lugot mahatz*).

But the Jewish leadership never forgot that its long-term enemy was Britain. Ben-Gurion and others soft-pedaled the long term and emphasized self-restraint (Hebrew: *havlagah*). This policy provoked a revolt within the Haganah by a group that came to be known as the *Irgun Zva'i Leumi*.

Deniability of Terrorism

The Irgun was inspired by Ben-Gurion's rival, Vladimir Jabotinsky, who set out what was then the extreme right-wing of the Zionist movement (and later became today's Likud Party). It favored an all-out war on both the Palestinians and the British. (The Irgun, in turn, would be split when Abraham Stern led about 200 of its members to form an even more radical and violent group called the *Lohamei Herut Yisraeli* or "Stern Gang.")

These radical, terrorist groups, although differing somewhat in their philosophy, remained under the control of the Haganah High Command. While the Zionists publicly denied it, the British published (Cmd. 6873) intercepted Jewish Agency telegrams proving that it was using Irgun and the Stern Gang to carry out actions it wished to disavow.

As one telegram put it: "We have come to a working arrangement with the dissident organisations, according to which we shall assign certain tasks to them under our command. They will act only according to our plan."

Perhaps the most remarkable element of the growing power of the *Yishuv* was in the field of intelligence. Already in 1933, a rudimentary organization had been created. A professor at the Hebrew University proposed that the Jewish National Fund make an inventory of Palestinian villages. His idea called for a dynamic, constantly updated, "map" of Palestinian society. It was a mammoth task.

As Jews from Iraq and other Arabic-speaking countries began to arrive, they were often assigned to this organization; then in 1944 a training school was established at Shefeya to train Hebrew-speaking operatives in Arabic and Palestinian culture and who were sent into every Palestinian village to identify potential enemies, map entry routes, inventory weapons, etc. In short, the agents produced an "appreciation" comparable to the CIA's National Intelligence Studies but were much more detailed. They shaped the 1946-1949 campaign and determined the outcome.

International Volunteers

The Jewish Agency and overseas Zionist organizations also recruited European and American volunteers. These men and women were much more numerous than the Arab volunteers. More important, they included highly trained people, some of whom had flown for the RAF or the USAF, commanded ships of war in the Royal Navy or the U.S. Navy or worked in high technology intelligence (such as code-breaking and wireless interception).

By May 1948, the Haganah numbered 35,700 standing troops of whom 2,200 were the Special Forces of Palmach. That is, as Benny Morris pointed out, the *Yishuv* army numbered some 5,500 *more* soldiers than the combined strength of the regular Arab armies and paramilitary Palestinian forces. In addition, Haganah could draw on 9,500 members of the paramilitary youth corps.

By July 1948, when the Haganah was renamed the Israel Defense Force, it had 63,000 men under arms. Perhaps more important than numbers, it had a command-and-control capability that allowed it to conduct division-size or multiple-brigade, operations. No Arab force even remotely approached its power.

The size and organization of manpower was matched by weaponry. While the British embargoed arms sales to both sides, their actions particularly affected the Arabs.

The *Yishuv* got around the British embargo in four ways: first, it worked with the local Communist Party to effect an arms purchase deal with Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union; second, it used some of the money it received from Jewish organizations in Europe and America to buy arms; third, it raided British army depots in Palestine and Europe; and, fourth, it had already begun producing in its own workshops such weapons as mortars, sub-machineguns, heavy machineguns, and the particularly devastating and terrifying flame throwers.

These activities gave the *Yishuv* an overwhelming advantage. Finally, it achieved "aerial superiority" when, on March 27, 1948, it employed its first airplanes, some provided by South Africa and others stolen from the RAF.

As the Jewish army chief of staff Yigael Yadin proudly told Israeli officers in the last weeks of March 1948, "Today we have all the arms we need; they are already aboard ships, and the British are leaving and then we bring in the weapons, and the whole situation at the fronts will change."

Expulsion of the Palestinians and War

Expulsion of the Palestinians began before large-scale fighting between the Jewish forces and Palestinian paramilitaries and at least three months before the withdrawal of the British forces and the arrival of Egyptian, Iraqi and Trans-Jordanian army units. From late 1947 until 1949, it was expulsion that set

the terms of combat.

Beginning in October 1947, *Yishuv* leader (and later Prime Minister) David Ben-Gurion established a sort of *politburo* that came to be known as “the Consultancy” to guide the armed forces into action to establish the *Judenstaat*. (A detailed account of the “Consultancy” with the plans and the actions it called for is far too long to be included here. It is laid out with citations in Ilan Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, pages 27-28, 39-126. The existence of all of these plans and what they called for was vigorously denied for half a century.)

The Consultancy inherited a plan of action to take over the Mandate that had been drawn up already in 1937. This was known as Plan A. In 1946, Ben-Gurion ordered the intelligence unit of the Haganah to revise the plan. Various changes and refinements were made in Plan B and what became known as Plan C (Hebrew: *Tachnit Gimel*) emerged.

Plan C laid out the strategy of the various military forces of the *Yishuv* “against rural and urban Palestine the moment the British were gone.” The envisaged offensive called for “killing the Palestinian political leadership, killing Palestinian ‘inciters’ and financial supporters, killing those Palestinians acting against the Jews, killing senior Palestinian officers and officials in the Mandate regime, damaging Palestinian transportation, damaging sources of Palestine economy (water wells, mills), attacking Palestinian villages and clubs, coffee house, meeting places, etc.,” according to the intelligence studies that were already drawn up.

A refined version, Plan D, was approved on March 10, 1948. As Ilan Pappé wrote, it “sealed the fate of the Palestinians within the territory the Zionist Leaders had set their eyes on for their future Jewish state ... [it] called for their systematic and total expulsion from their homeland. ... Each brigade commander received a list [based on the intelligence ‘map’] of the villages or neighbourhoods that had to be occupied, destroyed and their inhabitant expelled, with exact dates.

“These operations can be carried out in the following manner: either by destroying villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in the rubble) [to prevent the villagers from returning] ... in case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.”

Systematic Cleansing

Beginning in April 1948, as the British troops were withdrawn, area by area,

attacks on villages were increased. Ben-Gurion put aside the UN partition plan and ordered his troops to carry out as much as possible the ethnic cleansing of all of Palestine.

Pappe wrote: "Every brigade assigned to the operation was asked to prepare to move into *Mazev Dalet*, State D, that is, to ready themselves to implement the orders of Plan D: 'You will move to State Dalet, for an operative implementation of Plan Dalet,' was the opening sentence to each. And then the villages which you will capture, cleanse [Hebrew: *tihur*] or destroy will be decided according to consultation with our advisors on Arab affairs and the intelligence officers.

"Judging by the end result of this state, namely April-May 1948, this advice was not to spare a single village ... the operational orders did not except any village for any reason. With this the blueprint was converted into military order to begin destroying villages."

Eventually, of the roughly 700 Palestinian villages in what became Israel, 531 were to be destroyed in addition to 30 which had already been destroyed. (About 600 villages remained in "Arab Palestine," that is, on the West Bank – which was held by the Jordan Legion – and in Gaza – which was held by Egyptian forces.) Before the British withdrawal had been effected, about 250,000 villagers had already been uprooted.

The Palmach commander Yigal Allon's words were transcribed in the diary of David Ben-Gurion: "There is a need now for strong and brutal reaction. We need to be accurate about timing, place and those we hit. If we accuse a family – we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise, this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty."

The Deir Yasin Massacre

The best-known attack was by the Irgun and the Stern Gang, operating under the orders of (and in conjunction with) the Haganah, on the Palestinian village of Deir Yasin on April 9, 1948. The attack replayed the Nazi destruction of Lidice.

Already before the destruction of Deir Yasin, a member of the Defense Committee (Yosef Sepir) had warned his colleagues that the non-Jewish world might see the destruction of villages as an echo of the German destruction of the little Czech farming village of Lidice on June 10, 1942, in retaliation for the murder of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich.

At Lidice, all the adult males and most of women were then murdered and the site was plowed under to be "forever blotted from memory." The comparison of the two may be odious but it is hard to avoid.

Ilan Pappé summarized: "As they burst into the village the Jewish soldiers sprayed the houses with machine-gun fire, killing many of the inhabitants. The remaining villagers were then gathered in one place and murdered in cold blood, their bodies abused while a number of the women were raped and then killed... [One survivor, then a boy of 12 later] recalled, 'They took us out one after the other, shot an old man and when one of his daughters cried, she was shot too. Then they called my brother Muhammad, and shot him in front [of] us, and when my mother yelled, bending over him – carrying my little sister Hudra in her hands, still breastfeeding her – they shot her too.'"

Terror is of little use if it is not known; so the Irgun called a press conference to announce the slaughter at Deir Yasin. What happened in Deir Yasin was repeated time after time and became a part of the "whispering campaign" that was employed by the Haganah intelligence agency to stimulate Palestinian flight. The villagers were, of course, terrified and so exactly carried into effect what the campaign sought.

As General Yigal Allon of Palmach said, "The tactic reached its goal completely ... wide areas were cleaned."

Disinforming Americans

Following Deir Yasin, Ben-Gurion telegraphed Amir Abdullah of Trans-Jordan to disclaim responsibility. More important, a "disinformation" campaign in America sought to blame the Arab states for the expulsion of the Palestinians.

One, fairly typical, demarche was a pamphlet submitted to the UN General Assembly and widely quoted in the American press in December 1951. Its author and publisher were not named, but some pages of the pamphlet were signed by a number of notable Americans including Reinhold Niebuhr, Archibald MacLeish, Paul Porter (who had headed the Palestine Conciliation Commission), former President Roosevelt's principal foreign affairs adviser, Sumner Welles, together with various senior churchmen and academicians.

Attached to their message was backup material. The pamphlet's key charge was that "The record shows that it was an evacuation planned by the Arab war leaders and the Arab Higher Committee for the three-fold purpose of: 1. Clearing the roads of the villages for an advance of the Arab regular armies; 2. Demonstrating the inability of Jews and Arabs to live side by side. [and] 3. Disrupting services following the end of the mandate."

Those who questioned the account given in this and similar materials published in the campaign were charged as anti-Semites.

As the enormity of the human tragedy of Palestine began to be realized, if not

by the public at least by governments, the UN Security Council decided to appoint a negotiator to try to stop the fighting.

It turned to Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte whose record included saving some 31,000 people, including 1,615 Jews, from German concentration camps during the Second World War. He was unanimously appointed (UNSC Resolution 186) on May 14, 1948, to mediate the war, and the outstanding Afro-American scholar and official Ralph Bunche was assigned as his deputy.

Working from Cyprus, Bernadotte negotiated two truces and outlined plans both for settlement of the war and for the creation of a United Nations agency to care for the refugees. As they evolved, the "Bernadotte Plans" called for a two-state solution – a Jewish state and an Arab state – with economic union.

Bernadotte also proposed readjusting frontiers according to population – that is, the Jewish state would have to give up substantial areas (including the Negev) which were overwhelmingly settled by Arabs – and he called for Jerusalem to be given a special status as a multi-faith world heritage site. (The UNGA voted in December 1949 to internationalize the city in Resolution 194.)

Killing the Messenger

On the issue of the Palestinian refugees, Bernadotte was even more outspoken. To the fury of the Jewish leaders, he reported to the UN on Sept. 16, 1948, that "It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries."

Folke Bernadotte was murdered the next day by a hit squad of the Stern Gang, allegedly on orders of its leader and later Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

Bernadotte's task was taken up by his deputy, Ralph Bunche.

Bunche wisely recognized the two realities of the Arab side of the Palestine war: the first was that the Palestinian people, now scattered over virtually the whole of Western Asia had no ability to negotiate on their own behalf, and the second was that the Arab states, their self-proclaimed protectors, were incapable of working together.

So during the spring and summer of 1949, Bunche worked separately with Israel and each of the four Arab states – Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Trans-Jordan, which from April 1949 was known as Jordan. Iraq had withdrawn from the war and did not

take part in the negotiations to bring about an end to the fighting. For his work, he was awarded the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize.

Bernadotte's and Bunche's lasting legacy was the creation of a UN organization to care for the refugees. Relief efforts were begun in the summer of 1948 and in April 1950 a new organization, UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was created. It began its long life with 896,690 Palestinians on its rolls.

While the intent was to create opportunities for at least some of them to start new lives, the grim reality was that they could only be kept alive. They each received assistance of less than \$27 yearly for food, medicine, clothing and shelter.

First-Hand Accounts

In 1950, I spent two weeks in one of the camps in Lebanon talking with the refugees and wrote articles on what I learned. In one of the articles I described an encounter with a young man who had been paralyzed. Lying in his cot, he entertained and was waited on by a group of children. He built for them a model airplane and arranged that it dropped pebbles on his bed.

As he told it and as I described it, the children played as though being killed by the bombs, something they had observed in real life. But the editors at *The Christian Science Monitor*, echoing the prevalent American view of the war had the children only "seeking shelter from the bombs."

UN relief provided an average of 1,600 calories of food/day. But, if the physical diet was meager, the emotional diet was noxious. It consisted of a blend of exaggerated memories and unrealistic hopes.

Few refugees could find jobs. Idleness was a dry rot in adults. And a new generation was born that knew little beyond camp life. Within a few years over half the refugees were less than 15 years of age. They were becoming the modern version of Moses's followers' time in the Wilderness.

Trying to Leave the Wilderness

The Palestinian and Arab states' "Time in the Wilderness" lasted many years. The Palestinians emerged from their expulsion a beaten, humiliated, divided people. The miserable refugee camps recreated the divisions of villages. Each *watan* remained just a piece of the little "nations" (Arabic: *awtan* the plural of *watan*).

Those who sought to deal with "the Palestine problem" had to deal not with the Palestinians but with the Arab states. But the Arab states were themselves, in

the Biblical phrase, broken reeds “whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it.”

As the Palestinian nationalist leader and a founder of the League of Arab States, Musa Alami wrote, “In the face of the enemy the Arabs were not a state, but petty states; groups, not a nation; each fearing and anxiously watching the other and intriguing against it. What concerned them most and guided their policy was not to win the war and save Palestine ... but to prevent their neighbors from being predominant, even though nothing remained except the offal and bones.”

Such public opinion as there was (and such press as was free to express it) turned bitterly against the rulers of the states. Demonstrations broke out, government officials including the prime minister and chief of police of Egypt were assassinated while riots, attempted bombings and threats were almost daily occurrences.

In Syria, the government was overthrown in an army coup d’État in 1949, and its leader was quickly ousted by another group. In Jordan in July 1951, the newly proclaimed king was murdered by a Palestinian. Then, on Jan. 26, 1952, “Black Friday,” mobs raced through Cairo, burning, pillaging and killing. It became obvious that no Arab government could cope.

Recognition that more was wrong with Arab society than government was spreading. Explicit was the conviction that corruption, poverty and backwardness were both the inheritance of decades of imperialism and also that they were the results of structural defects in Arab society. These defects were not caused by events in Palestine, but they were highlighted by the shock of the Arab defeat there.

Arabs everywhere agitated for change. Each state cracked down on its critics but, ironically, the divisions of the “Arab World” into states – one of the sources of weakness – made criticism of neighbors attractive to rival governments.

“A new wind blows,” wrote a long-time English colonial administrator. “Poverty and ignorance can lie down more or less happily together, but not poverty and education. That nowadays is likely to be an explosive mixture.”

An Egyptian Revolt

The explosive mixture was first set off in Egypt. On July 23, 1952, the “Free Officers,” under the leadership of Gamal Abdul Nasser, who as a young officer had experienced humiliation in Egypt’s campaign in Gaza, ousted the King.

Nasser was not an uncritical supporter of the Palestinians. He was, however, a

dedicated believer in Arab nationalism. For him the Palestinian and Egyptian emphasis on the village "nation," the *watan*, was a part of the Arab problem; what was needed, he thought, was to move beyond that narrow concept toward "pan-Arabism" (Arabic: *qawmiyah*).

Only if the Arabs could rise above parochialism, as the Jews had done with their national ideology, Zionism, could the Arabs play a significant role in world affairs, achieve a minimum degree of security or even overcome the humiliation of Palestine. [Regarding the impact of Zionism, see Shlomo Sand's groundbreaking *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009)]

So, while Nasser dealt, or tried to deal, with a variety of domestic Egyptian and Arab World issues during his lifetime as well as with stormy relations with Britain, France and the United States, Palestine was never far from his mind.

Indeed, it could not be. If he or other Arab leaders forgot, Israel and the Western states reminded them sharply. When U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited the Middle East in 1953, seeking to enlist the Arab states' kings, dictators and presidents in his anti-Soviet crusade, he found them turning always from what he saw as the threat of the USSR to what they thought of as the threat of Israel.

Despite the armistice of 1949, the borders of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt were constantly being breached by raids and counter-raids, intelligence probes, commando attacks and "massive retaliations." They numbered in the thousands. All along the frontiers of Israel was a "no man's land."

The UN established a "Mixed Armistice Commission" to assess blame and to try to stop acts of aggression, but it was not effective. So some in America thought that a new approach must be found. And some thought that it had to be sought in Egypt.

The Israeli military intelligence organization was worried that Secretary Dulles's obsession with the Soviet threat might lead him to promote some sort of rapprochement with Egypt. To head this off, the Israelis, with the help of members of the Egyptian Jewish community, decided to undertake a "spoiling" operation in the spring and summer of 1954.

Code-named "Operation Susannah" and popularly known as the "Lavon Affair," the operation carried out a number of bombings and other acts of terrorism in Egypt. Included among them was the bombing of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) building in Alexandria, Egypt. The plan was to blame the attack on the Muslim Brotherhood; its aim was to turn Americans against Egypt by demonstrating that the Egyptians were dangerous terrorists.

The attack was botched and the agents were caught. Israel denied the episode, information on it was suppressed, but the Israeli government resigned. It implicitly admitted its involvement when in 2005, it decorated the attackers.

The Suez Crisis

Raids and counterattacks continued. One seminal Israeli raid was in February 1955 when the Israeli army attacked the Egyptian military headquarters in Gaza and killed more than 60 Egyptian soldiers. Apparently that raid so alarmed the Egyptians that they realized that they needed more and better military equipment.

Since the Western powers were supplying Israel, Egypt turned to the Soviet Union, just as the Zionists had done eight years before. That move, in turn, alarmed the Eisenhower administration.

Briefly put, it set in motion a sequence of events in which the U.S. (on July 20, 1956) withdrew its offer to help finance the major Egyptian development project, the High Dam; in riposte (on July 26) Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal; after a fruitless series of talks, Israel, joined by Britain and France, attacked Egypt (on Oct. 29). That was the Suez Crisis.

Both the shape of the British-French-Israeli "collusion" and the results of their action were then obscure, but President Eisenhower memorably spoke of the existence of "one law" under which all nations must live. To the annoyance of Secretary Dulles, he forced the three states to withdraw.

[Recounting the sequence of events in these years would lead me far afield and excessively lengthen this account so I refer the reader to my book, *The Arab World Today* which is the 5th edition of my book, *The United States and the Arab World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).]

America's brief turn against Israel resulted in the UN proclaimed ceasefire of Nov. 7, 1956, and the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to act as a buffer between Israel and Egypt.

Those who ultimately paid for the attack were the Jewish minority communities of the Arab countries. Then suspect as active or potential traitors in the increasingly nationalistic Arab societies, long-time resident Jewish communities came under pressure. Many Jews, with Israeli help and encouragement, left. Some went to Israel.

On the other side, the Suez war made Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser the Arab hero. This suggested to Dulles that Nasser might be turned into the leader of a move toward peace. To find out, Dulles sent one of Eisenhower's close

friends, Robert Anderson (who later would become Secretary of the Treasury), to discuss terms with Nasser.

The initiative was a disaster: neither Anderson nor Nasser understood what the other was saying. So the meetings were short, the understandings limited and the decisions evasive. The "Anderson Mission" was diplomacy at its worst. But, since both sides realized that disclosure of the talks could be politically ruinous, they agreed to keep them secret.

Still treated as "Top Secret" and tightly restricted, the CIA account of the talks was one of the first batches of papers I read when I joined the U.S. government in 1961. The price of super secrecy was evident in them: no one had time or scope to figure out what the other was saying, as Nasser admitted to the CIA's Kermit Roosevelt. It was evident in the papers that Anderson did not understand what Nasser was saying. As a colleague of mine quipped, "if I had been part of that mission, I would want it to be kept secret too!"

Failure of the talks was followed by a new round of coups, revolts and regional wars. The late 1950s was a time of Arab political upsets (particularly the Iraqi coup d'État of 1958, which was predicted by Richard Nolte, a later U.S. ambassador to Egypt, and me in a widely read article in *Foreign Affairs*, "Toward a Policy for the Middle East," which appeared two weeks before the coup.)

The late 1950s was also a time of American lethargy as Mr. Dulles's anti-Soviet pacts fell apart. Only the Israelis seemed to know what they wanted and how to get it.

Yet, it appeared to the incoming Kennedy Administration in 1961 that at least in one respect John Foster Dulles had been right: only President Nasser was capable of making peace. So President John Kennedy put an ambassador who was known and liked by the Egyptians into Cairo, sent the most "liberal" man in his entourage (Gov. Chester Bowles) and me to talk openly with Nasser and instructed me to prepare a draft Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. (It was the first of three I was to draft in years to come.)

At the time, most observers and certainly the American officials regarded the Palestinians as mere bystanders. They were not thought of as having any serious capacity to make either war or peace.

Israel Moves Further Ahead

Israel's first major task was to create a unified Jewish society from a deeply divided population. The Oriental Jews, as the Israeli-American scholar Nadav Safran wrote, "differed sharply in relevant historical background, culture, education, motivation, and even physical appearance from the European Jews."

Perhaps even more significant was their historical memory. Whereas European Jews had long suffered from anti-Semitism, the Oriental Jews lived as self-governing "nations" (Turkish: *milleyet*) in protected environments.

As Safran rather ponderously wrote, they "lived within a surrounding society that was itself organized for the most part on a regional and communal basis. Even where the host society's traditional structure had begun to crumble under the impact of nationalism and modernization, the bulk of the Jews had not yet been called upon to make the kind of drastic adjustments to that society that gave rise to the sort of dilemmas European Jews faced." That is, the cause of Zionism, anti-Semitism, was a Western, not a Middle Eastern, phenomenon. [See *Israel: The Embattled Ally* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) 91-92.]

And, of course, Oriental Jews had not experienced the Holocaust. So, one aspect of the "nation building" of Israel was to transfer to them the European Jewish experience. As several observers have commented, this involved the creation of a "Holocaust Industry."

In addition to the constant and powerful emphasis on the Holocaust as a unifying historical memory, the Hebrew language was made into a powerful nationalizing force. To prosper in Israel, one had to speak, read and write Hebrew. Not unlike America, where immigrants dropped their former languages, dress and habits to become "American," so in Israel arriving Jews rushed to become Israelis.

Education was the seedbed of the new nationalism and new nationhood.

Education had always been among the most laudable features of the Jewish experience.

The Western Jewish society was virtually completely literate, and from the beginning, it had more engineers, physicists, chemists, doctors and technicians than all of the Arab states and the Palestinian society combined. But among the Oriental Jews, more than half of the women and a quarter of the men were illiterate and by 1973 only one in each person in each 50 had graduated from university.

The founding of world-class universities and research institutions was the crown jewel of Israel. There was also a powerful military-industrial complex which enabled Israel to become one of the world's major suppliers of weapons. It began in the Mandate and was fed by universities and research centers. From the 1950s, it also was subsidized by the United States which purchased equipment from it and shared technology with it.

Getting Secrets

And, where the sharing was not complete enough, Israeli agents penetrated American security as in the case of the Israeli spy, Jonathan Pollard as well as other nations to obtain advanced and particularly dangerous weapons. The nuclear weapons technology of both America and France were successfully targeted. From at least 1961, Israel had acquired nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

In the field of foreign affairs, Israel used its arms industry and intelligence expertise to build relationships in both black African countries and white (Boer) ruled South Africa. Its main concern, however, was with the United States where it developed powerful alliances with lobbying groups.

This activity was the subject of a series of hearings conducted in 1963 by the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs under the chairmanship of Sen. William Fulbright on Israeli established and sponsored lobby groups that were considered to be foreign agents.

Another Israeli advantage was the *Yishuv*, its military command or its intelligence forces, which had a modernizing effect that was already evident in 1947 and became more so in the wars fought between the Arabs and Israel in 1956, 1967 and 1973. In each encounter, the Arabs were defeated decisively as Israel displayed military capacities of a different order.

Not only did Israel have sophisticated command and control techniques, including ground control for aircraft, but, given its social cohesion, it could increase its army from a standing force of no more than 50,000 to 300,000 in about 48 hours. I once was taken by the Israeli government to visit a tank brigade south of Tel Aviv that was maintained by only 200-300 men but could be put into action with 3,000 men in a few hours.

Wiping Out Arab Villages

Yet, from the Israeli perspective, perhaps the most important change in its national development was the wiping out of Palestine. Hundreds of villages were plowed under; the farm lands of many were converted into parks; old buildings, mosques and churches were bulldozed; roadways were changed; new maps were produced that no longer showed the old landmarks.

In a lecture, reported in *Haaretz* on April 3, 1969, Moshe Dayan acknowledged this policy, saying that "Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I don't blame you, since these [old] geography books no longer exist. Not only the books do not exist – the Arab villages are not there either."

Foreign journalists who tried to find the old villages, like *Observer* correspondent Sarah Helm and BBC and *Guardian* correspondent Michael Adams, were

attacked as anti-Semites and had trouble even publishing their accounts. [See Christopher Mayhew and Michael Adams' *Publish It Not* (London: Longman, 1975).]

Some Israelis even denied the existence of the Palestinians. Prime Minister Golda Meir was quoted in the London *Sunday Times* (June 15, 1969) as saying that "There was no such thing as Palestinians. ... They did not exist."

Palestinian Seek the Initiative

Much has been written about the ugliness, drama and diversity of the events of the 1950s and 1960s and of the brutality, audaciousness and variety of the actors. There is a vast literature on this topic, but much of the intelligence information is "tactical," dealing with how to apprehend or kill the various actors.

So complete is the focus on the dramatic aspects of these years that the underlying themes are often obscured. Yet, while the era's events are only of transient interest, the themes have had an enduring impact.

As I have written, the Palestinians could be likened to Moses' followers, former slaves whom he sought to turn into a warlike people by keeping them for two generations in the wilderness. Like all analogies, the comparison is not exact, but it is suggestive: the Palestinians had not been slaves but were a colonial people who had not yet received the stimulus of nationalism, and, while the camps in which they had been gathered were not exactly a "wilderness," they were as isolated and as destitute as Moses had intended for his people. Moses thought his people needed 40 years to be transformed; by roughly 1967, the Palestinians had suffered 20 years.

In those years, three themes become evident. The first theme is that during those first 20 years the Palestinians recreated the diversity and mutual incompatibility of the Palestinian village society and also were shaped by the diversity and regional differences of the camps.

Moses was right: 20 years was not long enough for a new and unified society to emerge. After 20 years, the Palestinians were still unable to work together. Their Israeli enemies profited from and encouraged their mutual hostilities, but the Palestinians lent themselves, almost eagerly, to the Israeli objective.

The second theme is the effect of the brutality of the conflict. From at least 1950, warfare along the frontiers had been endemic. It had also been as ugly as the Seventeenth Century's European Thirty Years War. Not only abduction, torture, rape and murder of men, women and children, but also mutilation filled the reports of the UN Mixed Armistice Commission.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of these events in shaping the attitudes toward one another of the Palestinians and the Israelis. Starkly put, the Israelis regarded the Palestinians as *untermenschen* while the Palestinians regarded the Israelis as monsters. Wounds were constantly opened and rubbed raw by thousands of incidents year after year.

Squeezing the Palestinians

The third theme is that during those years, few of the Palestinians had found “space” in which they could be peacefully active. Some actually prospered, at least financially, by moving to the oil-rich countries of the Gulf but at the cost of withdrawing from their people. Even the most successful realized that they had no future in their diaspora. They had acquired only what the Jews called a *nachtayst* and the Arabs knew as a *mahal* – a temporary resting place.

And, as they competed with natives for jobs, contracts and wealth, the Palestinians found themselves the objects of local hostilities similar to those the Jews had suffered in Europe. While foreign propagandists insisted that the Arab states “absorb” the Palestinians, the natives regarded the Palestinians not only as foreigners but also as reminders of the Arab disgrace (Arabic: *nakbah*) in the 1948-1949 war.

Since there was no forum in which the Palestinians could be constructively active, those Palestinians whose names we remember turned to the weapon of the weak, terrorism. Middle Easterners would be hypocritical to claim the high ground of morality on terrorism. On terrorism, the Jews had led the way, and the Palestinians eagerly followed in their footsteps.

Terrorism is undoubtedly an ugly policy, but when other means of action are not available it has been adopted by people of every race, creed and ideology. [I offer proof of this in my book *Violent Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).]

Some of the former Israeli terrorists, having emerged victorious in their fighting against the British and the Palestinians, became leaders inside the Israeli government, just as former Algerian terrorists merged into the Algerian government. In a way, both were to become role models for at least some Palestinians.

By the 1960s, however, it was evident to the Palestinians that the small and ephemeral rival groups of anti-Israeli paramilitaries (Arabic: *fedayeen*) were not effective either politically or militarily. The reason why is simple. France could afford to leave Algeria – indeed it could not afford to stay – but the Israelis had nowhere to go and were determined to stay.

Fruitless Violence

So the dozens of Palestinian groups engaged in fruitless bouts of violence. The best known were the September 1970 "Hijack war" by the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine," the "Black September" attack of September 1972 on the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in revenge for the destruction of two Palestinian villages, the flamboyant murders of the Venezuelan "Carlos the Jackal" and other incidences.

That these actions were pointless and drew opprobrium upon all the Arabs had become evident to the Arab states by September 1963, so the Arab states collectively agreed to form the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It is noteworthy that it was the Arab states (from above) rather than the Palestinians (from within) that took this step.

But, a group of some 400 Palestinians under the auspices of King Husain of Jordan met in Jerusalem where they took the step of actually setting up the organization. The objectives of the PLO were set in terms that the Palestinians generally approved – elimination of Zionism, destruction of Israel, self-determination for the Palestinians, and the right of return to the Palestinian homeland.

The PLO "constitution" did not proclaim statehood. It would be a decade before it demanded that status. Initially, indeed, the PLO was only a confederation of different, even opposing, Palestinian groups and could operate only on the sufferance of non-Palestinians.

The closest they came to having a territorial state was that they were recognized as having a notional claim to territory under Israeli occupation; Jordan did not recognize their authority on the West Bank nor did Egypt recognize their authority in Gaza. In effect, the PLO was relegated to a sort of observer status on the issue of Palestine.

The PLO's largest component – eventually reaching about 80 percent of the membership – was FATAH (the reverse acronym of the Arabic: *Harakat at-Tahrir al-Falastini*).

Arafat's Emergence

While its origins and early activities are necessarily obscure, we know that it grew out of meetings of a group of Palestinian refugees in Gaza led by Yasir Arafat, who had been born in Gaza and, although he spent his early life in poverty, trained as an engineer.

Arafat could have secured a job in the oil-rich Arab states, but he set his

sight on Palestine. Having studied in Egypt, he probably joined the Muslim Brotherhood. Then forced to leave in 1954, he spent the next ten years moving through the refugee camps, recruiting followers and broadcasting his message "that the Palestinians had to take their destiny into their own hands and start harassing Israel." [See Yahosifat Harkabi, *Fedayeen Action and Arab Strategy*, (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1968). General Harkabi, head of Israeli military intelligence and a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was probably the best outside observer of FATAH.]

As Arafat's group coalesced, the members set about indoctrinating the Palestinian community with a series of pamphlets. Their fundamental thesis was that the only feasible action of the Palestinians was guerrilla warfare.

In this, Arafat and most Arabs drew on the lesson of the Algerian war of national liberation. Thus, they argued that the role of the conventional Arab states' armies was largely irrelevant, just as the so-called External Army of the Algerians (which had sat out the war in Tunisia and Morocco) had been; what counted in Algeria and would count in the Palestine conflict, they believed, was the informal or guerrilla forces that were known in Algeria as the for "neighborhood" or "popular" (Arabic: *wilaya*) forces.

Beginning in 1966, the paramilitary forces of, FATAH carried out raids on Israel from bases in Syria. The Israeli government repeatedly warned Syria that it risked a massive Israeli retaliation.

In the first days of May 1967, Soviet intelligence passed to the Egyptian government information that Israel was preparing to attack, and this estimate seemed confirmed by a speech on May 12 by the Israeli prime minister.

Old enmities between the Arab states, no matter how bitter, were brushed aside as the crisis expanded. Even Kuwait, usually a cautious observer rather than an active participant, put its tiny armed forces at the disposal of the Egyptian general staff, and at an Arab League meeting all the members declared their support. The Middle East rushed toward war.

Toward the 1967 War

Here I must turn back from FATAH to the Arab states and particularly to Egypt. During the years following the 1952 Israeli-French-British attack on Egypt at Suez, Egypt had built a much larger and more competent army and with Soviet help had equipped it.

But, it seemed to me at the time, that it had two fatal weaknesses: first, it was obsolescent. It was essentially a Second World War army whereas Israel had an ultra-modern force, and, second, it was divided.

Most of the best units of the army were then in Yemen fighting the royalist guerrillas. But Nasser had accepted the assurance of his principal military adviser that the army was so strong that the Israelis would not dare attack it. He was wrong and should have known better.

That assessment led Nasser to play the dangerous game of brinkmanship which he was not equipped to play. He was partly pushed beyond reason by the Syrian and Jordanian governments and to a lesser extent by the Palestinians. They taunted him for cowardly hiding behind the UN force (UNEF) that patrolled the Sinai Peninsula.

Partly in an emotional personal reaction, Nasser decided to replace UNEF with Egyptian troops. The flashpoint was at the Straits of Tiran which was legally Egyptian – the ship channel, Enterprise Passage, is just 500 meters off the Egyptian mainland, – but it was of crucial importance to Israel as the only access to its port at Elath. Foolishly, Nasser “miscalculated.”

He announced that “Under no circumstances will we allow the Israeli flag to pass through the Gulf of Aqaba. The Jews threaten war. We tell them you are welcome. We are ready for war, but under no circumstances will we abandon any of our rights. This water is ours.”

All of the angers, frustrations and humiliations of the Arabs for the previous 20 years showed in that emotional statement. For Israel, it was tantamount to a declaration of war. But for the strenuous urging of the U.S. government, Israel would have immediately attacked.

Remarkably, the governments of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union each tried to pressure Nasser into backing down. At the time, I warned that he would not or perhaps even could not. He was less able to do so when the normally cautious King of Jordan embraced him and Egypt’s policy. Meanwhile, President Lyndon Johnson told the Israeli government that he was prepared to break the blockade with American naval power.

In the flurry of diplomatic activity, the U.S. government believed as late as the evening of Saturday, June 3, that the crisis had passed.

War Comes

Walt Rostow, who was then head of the National Security Council, arranged a briefing for me with senior State Department officers, all of whom asserted that the danger of war had passed. I thought this was nonsense and wrote a memorandum explaining why.

Rostow promised to give my analysis to the President and secretaries of State

and Defense. In it, I predicted Israel would attack within 72 hours. I was wrong. War began in 36 hours.

Two hours after dawn on Monday, June 5, fighter bombers of the Israeli Air Force caught the Egyptian Air Force on the ground and largely destroyed it. With mastery of the air, the Israeli army crushed the Egyptian forces in Sinai; then it turned on Jordan and threw the Jordanian army back across the Jordan River; and in a furious assault it destroyed the bulk of the Syrian army and reached the suburbs of Damascus.

Incidental to the attack against the Arabs was an Israeli attack on America. On June 8, 1967, Israel attempted to sink the U.S. Navy ship, the "Liberty" – the first time since Pearl Harbor that an American naval ship was attacked in peacetime. The attack showed both that the Israelis were prepared to "bite the hand that fed them" and that the U.S. government was willing to be bitten without even saying "ouch."

The why behind the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty has long been debated. But Israel had secrets that it didn't want the world to know. Among them, Israelis were executing bound Egyptian prisoners of war (which the Liberty overheard the Israelis discussing on the radio) and they had attacked a UN convoy. Johnson called back aircraft that were going to the aid of the Americans because he didn't want to stop the Israelis.

While the Israelis, lamely, said the attack was an accident, they knew the ship was part of the U.S. Navy; they inspected it for eight hours and then Israeli jets and ships fired into it with machineguns, cannon and rockets and set it afire with napalm and launched torpedoes at it.

Clearly, they were attempting to sink it and the fact that they particularly targeted the life rafts suggests that they hoped there would be no survivors. They killed 34 U.S. service men and wounded 171. The surviving crew members were threatened with courts-martial if they discussed what had happened and the key intelligence materials including intercept tapes were kept secret for the next 35 years.

Other than the drama and the pain, what was the long-term import of this incident? If I were an Israeli policy planner, as I have been an American policy planner, I would discount all future American protests and warnings.

After all, if the U.S. government did not react strongly to an attack on one of its ships with the killing of uniformed sailors, would it react forcefully to lesser provocations? Apparently, that message was not lost on Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Second Arab Disaster

The war was a disaster for the Arabs and particularly for the Palestinians: In these encounters, the Arab states armies suffered the loss of about 25,000 men which, given their populations was proportionally equivalent to the loss of about 5 million Americans. About 175,000 Palestinian refugees were forced to flee once again and 350,000 additional people were turned into refugees. The humiliating defeats infected the "Arab street," as journalists like to call the general public, with a sullen and tenacious hatred.

As a result of my accurate prediction of the war and because of my relationship with McGeorge Bundy to whom Johnson turned over the Middle East problem, I was called to the White House on June 5, 1967, to write a plan for a ceasefire and a subsequent peace treaty.

Johnson made both tasks impossible by deciding not to allow negotiations with the Egyptians. That was to be one of the several opportunities to bring the long war to an end. For better or for worse, it was missed and the fighting spread.

I had resigned from the Policy Planning Council in 1965 and was then Professor of History at the University of Chicago and President of the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs.

An amusing personal note: I had purposely not kept up my security clearance because I wanted to be free to write completely independently. So when I arrived at the White House, I had to be escorted to the office that was assigned to me. It had been Lyndon Johnson's office when he was Vice President. But all the furniture was taken out so I spent the first few hours sitting on the floor.

I took this as proof that unlike the 1956 Suez crisis, there was no "collusion" on the 1967 war. I was given, I believe, access to all the materials the President and Bundy were receiving. But my stay lasted only a day. When Johnson decided not to negotiate, I returned to Chicago.

A New Direction

Arafat saw the defeat of the Arab states and particularly of Jordan in the war as an opportunity. Once more, he thought, the Palestinians must take the lead: rather than being led (and unified) by the states; it would be the historical role of the Palestinians to lead (and unify) the Arab governments.

Nasser appeared to be a spent force; Assad in Syria had proven weak and vacillating; King Husain's covert deals with Israel had not saved him; and Lebanon seemed irrelevant. Arafat's FATAH took control of the PLO.

After the 1967 war, the second disaster for the Palestinian people, the refugee community grew to some 1,375,915. And, from the bitter defeats of the armies of Syria, Jordan and Egypt, the Palestinians drew the lesson that they were on their own.

But Israel's victory appeared, paradoxically, to create a new vulnerability: having battled for a strategically secure frontier, Israel had acquired a strategically insecure population. Arafat saw this in the context of what was then exciting to the Palestinians, the Algerian defeat of the French.

In that battle less than 13,000 Algerians defeated 485,000 French soldiers. By using guerrilla tactics, they wore down the French and got them to leave. Arafat thought the Palestinians might be able to do the same.

The confrontation with Israel had to be, Arafat maintained, a war of attrition. It was bitterly fought at first, but the cost was too high for Jordan to bear. Fearing that the PLO would use the conflict to take over Jordan and turn it into a Palestinian state (rather than, as he was prepared to allow, the Palestinians being or becoming Jordanians) King Husain rounded on the PLO with his largely Bedouin army.

Black September

To the Bedouin, the Palestinian cause was irrelevant while loyalty to the king was obligatory. On June 9, 1970, there was an attempt to assassinate King Husain, attacks were carried out on the royal palace and the national radio station and at least 60 foreigners were taken hostage.

Next the PLO demanded that the King dismiss his uncle as commander of the armed forces. The King complied. The final act in the drama was the hijacking of four commercial jets whose passengers were held hostage in the second week of September 1970.

It was a hijack too far. The king had to respond or abdicate. He responded. The Jordanian army rampaged through the refugee camps in what came to be called "Black September." Casualty figures are only estimates but between 5,000 and 10,000 seems a reasonable guess.

In two weeks, the PLO had been crushed. But, wisely, Husain gave the PLO an out: he flew to Cairo to sign a deal with Arafat. Driven from Jordan, the PLO moved its operations to Lebanon where some 300,000 Palestinians lived in refugee camps under the UNRWA flag.

Though the Israelis were glad to get the PLO out of Jordan, they were not disposed to allow it free rein in Lebanon. They attacked the Beirut airport in

December 1968 and began a series of further operations in the following months designed to force the Lebanese government to suppress Arafat's followers.

Suez Ceasefire

Meanwhile, along the Suez Canal what amounted to "low intensity" war continued. The two armies were just a "stone's throw" apart along the narrow waterway. Neither could move forward, but neither would retreat. Casualties were mounting steadily without any discernable result for either side. Sniping, augmented by commando raids, was backed up by artillery barrages.

The Israelis realized that nothing was being gained and they wanted to achieve a ceasefire; so Prime Minister Meir asked me to be the mediator with President Nasser. I did and the ceasefire was achieved shortly before his death. The Egyptian leader who once dreamt of Arab unity died on Sept. 28, 1970.

In this middle period of the Zionist experience marked by the creation of the Israeli state and its successful wars against the Palestinians and neighboring Arab states the land of Israel underwent an almost total transformation from what had been the British mandate. The transformation involved the arrival of about 1.5 million Jewish immigrants, with nine out of ten coming from Eastern Europe.

Israel's transformation also benefitted from enormous infusions of American money. In the years from 1947-1973, that money amounted in various forms to over \$100 billion or roughly \$33,000 for each man, woman and child.

Finding Israeli intelligence very effective, the CIA also underwrote those activities with probably about \$100 million a year to gain at least some access to Israeli findings and in return shared with the Israelis the CIA's own "take."

William R. Polk was a member of the Policy Planning Council, responsible for North Africa, the Middle East and West Asia, for four years under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, He was a member of the three-men Crisis Management Committee during the Cuban Missile Crisis. During those years he wrote two proposed peace treaties for the American government and negotiated one major ceasefire between Israel and Egypt. Later he was Professor of History at the University of Chicago, founding director of the Middle Eastern Studies Center and President of the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs. He is the author of some 17 books on world affairs, including *The United States and the Arab World; The Elusive Peace, the Middle East in the Twentieth Century; Understanding Iraq; Understanding Iran; Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency and Terrorism; Neighbors and Strangers: The Fundamentals of Foreign Affairs* and numerous articles in *Foreign Affairs, The Atlantic, Harpers, The*

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and Le Monde Diplomatique . He has lectured at many universities and at the Council on Foreign Relations, Chatham House, Sciences Po, the Soviet Academy of Sciences and has appeared frequently on NPR, the BBC, CBS and other networks. His most recent books, both available on Amazon, are *Humpty Dumpty: The Fate of Regime Change* and *Blind Man's Buff, a Nove*.

How Israel Out-Foxed US Presidents

From the Archive: After six years, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has nearly weathered his chilly relationship with President Obama and can expect to coast through the next two years ignoring Obama's appeals. But Obama is not the first U.S. president to be played by Israel, as Morgan Strong wrote in 2010.

By Morgan Strong (Originally published May 31, 2010)

At the end of a news conference on April 13, 2010, President Barack Obama made the seemingly obvious point that the continuing Middle East conflict pitting Israel against its Arab neighbors will end up "costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure."

Obama's remark followed a similar statement in congressional testimony by Gen. David Petraeus on March 16, linking the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the challenges that U.S. troops face in the region.

"The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel," Petraeus said in prepared testimony. "Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the [region] and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support."

[Petraeus later tried to back away from this implicit criticism of Israel, fearing that it would hurt his political standing with his neoconservative allies. He began insisting that the analysis was only part of his written testimony, not his oral remarks.]

Yet, the truth behind the assessments from Obama and Petraeus is self-evident to anyone who has spent time observing the Middle East for the past six decades. Even the staunchly pro-Israeli Bush administration made similar observations.

In 2007 in Jerusalem, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice termed the Israeli/Palestinian peace process of "strategic interest" to the United States and expressed empathy for the beleaguered Palestinian people. "The prolonged experience of deprivation and humiliation can radicalize even normal people," Rice said, referring to acts of Palestinian violence.

But the recent statement by Obama and Petraeus aroused alarm among some Israeli supporters who reject any suggestion that Israel's harsh treatment of Palestinians might be a factor in the anti-Americanism surging through the Islamic world.

After Petraeus's comment, the pro-Israeli Anti-Defamation League said linking the Palestinian plight and Muslim anger was "dangerous and counterproductive."

"Gen. Petraeus has simply erred in linking the challenges faced by the U.S. and coalition forces in the region to a solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and blaming extremist activities on the absence of peace and the perceived U.S. favoritism for Israel," ADL national director Abraham Foxman said.

However, the U.S. government's widespread (though often unstated) recognition of the truth behind the assessment in Petraeus's testimony has colored how the Obama administration has reacted to the intransigence of Israel's Likud government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The U.S. government realizes how much it has done on Israel's behalf, even to the extent of making Americans the targets of Islamic terrorism such as the 9/11 attacks (as the 9/11 Commission discovered but played down) and sacrificing the lives of thousands of U.S. troops fighting in Middle East conflicts.

That was the backdrop in March 2009 for President Obama's outrage over the decision of the Netanyahu government to continue building Jewish housing in Arab East Jerusalem despite the fact that the move complicated U.S. peace initiatives and was announced as Vice President Joe Biden arrived to reaffirm American support for Israel.

However, another little-acknowledged truth about the U.S.-Israeli relationship is that Israeli leaders have frequently manipulated and misled American presidents out of a confidence that U.S. politicians deeply fear the political fallout from any public battle with Israel.

Given that history, few analysts who have followed the arc of U.S.-Israeli relations since Israel's founding in 1948 believe that the Israeli government is likely to retreat very much in its confrontation with President Obama. [Now, nearly six years into Obama's presidency after Netanyahu's persistent obstruction of Palestinian peace talks and his steady expansion of Jewish

settlements that assessment has proved out.]

Manipulating Eisenhower

In the 1950s, President Dwight Eisenhower was a strong supporter of the fledgling Jewish state and had supplied Israel with advanced U.S. weaponry. Yet, despite Eisenhower's generosity and good intentions, Israel sided with the British and French in 1956 in a conspiracy against him. Israeli leaders joined a secret arrangement that involved Israel invading Egypt's Sinai, which then allowed France and Great Britain to introduce their own forces and reclaim control of the Suez Canal.

In reaction to the invasion, the Soviet Union threatened to intervene on the side of Egypt by sending ground troops. With Cold War tensions already stretched thin by the crises in Hungary and elsewhere, Eisenhower faced the possibility of a showdown between nuclear-armed adversaries. Eisenhower demanded that the Israeli-spearheaded invasion of the Sinai be stopped, and he brought financial and political pressures to bear on Great Britain and France.

A ceasefire soon was declared, and the British and French departed, but the Israelis dragged their heels. Eisenhower finally presented Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion with an ultimatum, a threat to cut off all U.S. aid. Finally, in March 1957, the Israelis withdrew. [For details, see *Eisenhower and Israel* by Isaac Alteras.]

Even as it backed down in the Sinai, Israel was involved in another monumental deception, a plan for building its own nuclear arsenal. In 1956, Israel had concluded an agreement with France to build a nuclear reactor in the Negev desert. Israel also signed a secret agreement with France to build an adjacent plutonium reprocessing plant.

Israel began constructing its nuclear plant in 1958. However, French President Charles de Gaulle was worried about nuclear weapons destabilizing the Middle East and insisted that Israel not develop a nuclear bomb from the plutonium processing plant. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion assured de Gaulle that the processing plant was for peaceful purposes only.

After John F. Kennedy became President, he also wrote to Ben-Gurion explicitly calling on Israel not to join the nuclear-weapons club, drawing another pledge from Ben-Gurion that Israel had no such intention. Nevertheless, Kennedy continued to press, forcing the Israelis to let U.S. scientists inspect the nuclear reactor at Dimona. But the Israelis first built a fake control room while bricking up and otherwise disguising parts of the building that housed the plutonium processing plant.

In return for allowing inspectors into Dimona, Ben-Gurion also demanded that the United States sell Hawk surface-to-air missiles to the Israeli military. Kennedy agreed to the sale as a show of good faith. Subsequently, however, the CIA got wind of the Dimona deception and leaked to the press that Israel was secretly building a nuclear bomb.

After Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson also grew concerned over Israel's acquiring nuclear weapons. He asked then-Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Eshkol assured Johnson that Israel was studying the matter and would sign the treaty in due course. However, Israel has never signed the treaty and never has admitted that it developed nuclear weapons. [For details, see *Israel and The Bomb* by Avner Cohen.]

Trapping Johnson

As Israel grew more sophisticated and more confident in its dealings with U.S. presidents, it also sought to secure U.S. military assistance by exaggerating its vulnerability to Arab attacks. One such case occurred after the Egyptians closed off the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel in May 1967, denying the country its only access to the Red Sea. Israel threatened military action against Egypt if it did not re-open the Gulf.

Israel then asked President Johnson for military assistance in the event war broke out against the Egyptians. Johnson directed Richard Helms, the newly appointed head of the CIA to evaluate Israel's military capability in the event of war against the surrounding Arab states.

On May 26, 1967, Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban met with Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and Helms. Eban presented a Mossad estimate of the capability of the Arab armies, claiming that Israel was seriously outgunned by the Arab armies which had been supplied with advanced Soviet weaponry. Israel believed that, owing to its special relationship with the United States, the Mossad intelligence assessment would be taken at face value.

However, Helms was asked to present the CIA estimate of the Arabs' military capabilities versus the Israeli army. The CIA's analysts concluded that Israel could "defend successfully against simultaneous Arab attacks on all fronts, or hold on any three fronts while mounting a successful major offensive on the fourth." [See "C.I.A. Analysis of the 1967 Arab Israeli War," Center for the Study of Intelligence.]

"We do not believe that the Israeli appreciation was a serious estimate of the sort they would submit to their own high officials," the CIA report said. "It is probably a gambit intended to influence the U.S. to provide military supplies,

make more public commitments to Israel, to approve Israeli military initiatives, and put more pressure on Egyptian President Nasser." [See *A Look Over My Shoulder* by Richard Helms.]

The CIA report stated further that the Soviet Union would probably not interfere militarily on behalf of the Arab states and that Israel would defeat the combined Arab armies in a matter of days. As a consequence, Johnson refused to airlift special military supplies to Israel, or to promise public support for Israel if Israel went to war.

The Six-Day Success

Despite Johnson's resistance, Israel launched an attack on its Arab neighbors on June 5, 1967, claiming that the conflict was provoked when Egyptian forces opened fire. (The CIA later concluded that it was Israel that had first fired upon Egyptian forces.)

On June 8, at the height of the conflict, which would become known as the Six-Day War, Israeli fighter/bombers attacked the USS Liberty, a lightly armed communications vessel sent on a mission to relay information on the course of the war to U.S. naval intelligence.

The attack killed 34 American sailors, and wounded 171 others. Israeli leaders have always claimed that they had mistaken the U.S. vessel for an enemy ship, but a number of U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, believed the attack was deliberate, possibly to prevent the United States from learning about Israel's war plans. [See *As I Saw It* by Dean Rusk.]

However, in deference to Israel, the U.S. government did not aggressively pursue the matter of the Liberty attack and even issued misleading accounts in medal citations to crew members, leaving out the identity of the attackers.

Meanwhile, on land and in the air, Israel's powerful military advanced, shredding the Arab defenses. Soon, the conflict escalated into another potential showdown between nuclear-armed superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States. On June 10, President Johnson received a "Hot Line" message from Soviet Premier Alexi Kosygin. The Kremlin warned of grave consequences if Israel continued its military campaign against Syria by entering and/or occupying that country.

Johnson dispatched the Sixth Fleet to the Mediterranean, in a move to convince the Soviets of American resolve. But a ceasefire was declared later the same day, with Israel ending up in control of Syria's Golan Heights, Egypt's Sinai, and Palestinian lands including Gaza and East Jerusalem.

But a wider war was averted. Johnson's suspicions about Israel's expansionist intent had kept the United States from making an even bigger commitment that might have led to the Soviets countering with an escalation of their own.

Nixon and Yom Kippur

Israeli occupation of those additional Arab lands set the stage for a resumption of hostilities six years later, on Oct. 6, 1973, with the Yom Kippur War, which began with a surprise attack by Egypt against Israeli forces in the Sinai.

The offensive caught Israel off guard and Arab forces were close to overrunning Israel's outer defenses and entering the country. According to later accounts based primarily on Israeli leaks, Prime Minister Golda Meir and her "kitchen cabinet" ordered the arming of 13 nuclear weapons, which were aimed at Egyptian and Syrian targets.

Israeli Ambassador to the United States Simha Dintz warned President Richard Nixon that very serious repercussions would occur if the United States did not immediately begin an airlift of military equipment and personnel to Israel. Fearing that the Soviet Union might intervene and that nuclear war was possible, the U.S. military raised its alert level to DEFCON-3. U.S. Airborne units in Italy were put on full alert, and military aid was rushed to Israel.

Faced with a well-supplied Israeli counteroffensive and possible nuclear annihilation, the Arab forces fell back. The war ended on Oct. 26, 1973, but the United States had again been pushed to the brink of a possible superpower confrontation due to the unresolved Israeli-Arab conflict.

Nuclear 'Ambiguity'

On Sept. 22, 1979, after some clouds unexpectedly broke over the South Indian Ocean, a U.S. intelligence satellite detected two bright flashes of light that were quickly interpreted as evidence of a nuclear test. The explosion was apparently one of several nuclear tests that Israel had undertaken in collaboration with the white-supremacist government of South Africa. But President Jimmy Carter at the start of his reelection bid didn't want a showdown with Israel, especially on a point as sensitive as its secret nuclear work with the pariah government in Pretoria.

So, after news of the nuclear test leaked a month later, the Carter administration followed Israel's longstanding policy of "ambiguity" about the existence of its nuclear arsenal, a charade dating back to Richard Nixon's presidency with the United States pretending not to know for sure that Israel possessed nuclear bombs.

The Carter administration quickly claimed that there was “no confirmation” of a nuclear test, and a panel was set up to conclude that the flashes were “probably not from a nuclear explosion.” However, as investigative reporter Seymour Hersh and various nuclear experts later concluded, the flashes were most certainly an explosion of a low-yield nuclear weapon. [For details, see Hersh’s *Samson Option*.]

Getting Carter

Despite Carter’s helpful cover-up of the Israeli-South African nuclear test, he was still viewed with disdain by Israel’s hard-line Likud leadership. Indeed, he arguably was the target of Israel’s most audacious intervention in U.S. politics.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin was furious at Carter over the 1978 Camp David accords in which the U.S. President pushed the Israelis into returning the Sinai to the Egyptians in exchange for a peace agreement. The next year, Carter failed to protect the Shah of Iran, an important Israeli regional ally who was forced from power by Islamic militants. Then, when Carter acceded to demands from the Shah’s supporters to admit him to New York for cancer treatment, Iranian radicals seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans hostage.

In 1980, as Carter focused on his reelection campaign, Begin saw both dangers and opportunities. High-ranking Israeli diplomat/spy David Kimche described Begin’s thinking in the 1991 book, *The Last Option*, recounting how Begin feared that Carter might force Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and accept a Palestinian state if he won a second term.

“Begin was being set up for diplomatic slaughter by the master butchers in Washington,” Kimche wrote. “They had, moreover, the apparent blessing of the two presidents, Carter and [Egyptian President Anwar] Sadat, for this bizarre and clumsy attempt at collusion designed to force Israel to abandon her refusal to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state.”

Begin’s alarm was driven by the prospect of Carter being freed from the pressure of having to face another election, according to Kimche.

“Unbeknownst to the Israeli negotiators, the Egyptians held an ace up their sleeves, and they were waiting to play it,” Kimche wrote. “The card was President Carter’s tacit agreement that after the American presidential elections in November 1980, when Carter expected to be re-elected for a second term, he would be free to compel Israel to accept a settlement of the Palestinian problem on his and Egyptian terms, without having to fear the

backlash of the American Jewish lobby.”

So, by spring 1980, Begin had privately sided with Carter’s Republican rival, Ronald Reagan, a reality that Carter soon realized. Questioned by congressional investigators in 1992 regarding allegations about Israel conspiring with Republicans in 1980 to help unseat him, Carter said he knew by April 1980 that “Israel cast their lot with Reagan,” according to notes found among the unpublished documents in the files of a House task force that looked into the so-called October Surprise case.

Carter traced the Israeli opposition to his reelection to a “lingering concern [among] Jewish leaders that I was too friendly with Arabs.” [For details, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Doing What Was Necessary

Begin was an Israeli leader committed to do whatever he felt necessary to advance Israeli security interests and the dream of a Greater Israel with Jews controlling the ancient Biblical lands. Before Israel’s independence in 1948, he had led a Zionist terrorist group, and he founded the right-wing Likud Party in 1973 with the goal of “changing the facts on the ground” by placing Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas.

Begin’s anger over the Sinai deal and his fear of Carter’s reelection set the stage for secret collaboration between Begin and the Republicans, according to another former Israeli intelligence official, Ari Ben-Menashe.

“Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David,” Ben-Menashe wrote in his 1992 memoir, *Profits of War*. “As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel’s back.”

Ben-Menashe, an Iranian-born Jew who had immigrated to Israel as a teen-ager, became part of a secret Israeli program to reestablish its Iranian intelligence network that had been decimated by the Islamic revolution. Ben-Menashe wrote that Begin authorized shipments to Iran of small arms and some military spare parts, via South Africa, as early as September 1979 and continued them despite Iran’s seizure of the U.S. hostages in November 1979.

Extensive evidence also exists that Begin’s preference for Reagan led the Israelis to join in a covert operation with Republicans to contact Iranian leaders behind Carter’s back, interfering with the President’s efforts to free the 52 American hostages before the November 1980 elections.

That evidence includes statements from senior Iranian officials, international

arms dealers, intelligence operatives (including Ben-Menashe), and Middle East political figures (including a cryptic confirmation from Begin's successor Yitzhak Shamir). But the truth about the October Surprise case remains in dispute to this day. [For the latest details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

It is clear that after Reagan defeated Carter, and the U.S. hostages were released immediately upon Reagan being sworn in on Jan. 20, 1981, Israeli-brokered weapons shipments flowed to Iran with the secret blessing of the new Republican administration.

Dealing with Reagan

The Israel Lobby had grown exponentially since its start in the Eisenhower years. Israel's influential supporters were now positioned to use every political device imaginable to lobby Congress and to get the White House to acquiesce to whatever Israel felt it needed.

President Reagan also credentialed into the Executive Branch a new group of pro-Israeli American officials the likes of Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle, Michael Ledeen and Jeane Kirkpatrick who became known as the neocons.

Yet, despite Reagan's pro-Israel policies, the new U.S. President wasn't immune from more Israeli deceptions and additional pressures. Indeed, whether because of the alleged collusion with Reagan during the 1980 campaign or because Israel sensed its greater clout within his administration, Begin demonstrated a new level of audacity.

In 1981, Israel recruited Jonathan Pollard, an American Navy intelligence analyst, as a spy to acquire American intelligence satellite photos. Eventually, Pollard purloined massive amounts of intelligence information, some of which was reportedly turned over to Soviet intelligence by Israel to win favors from Moscow.

Prime Minister Begin sensed, too, that the time was ripe to gain the upper hand on other Arab enemies. He turned his attention to Lebanon, where the Palestine Liberation Organization was based. When U.S. intelligence warned Reagan that Israel was massing troops along the border with Lebanon, Reagan sent a cable to Begin urging him not to invade. But Begin ignored Reagan's plea and invaded Lebanon the following day, on June 6, 1982. [See *Time*, Aug. 16, 1982.]

As the offensive progressed, Reagan sought a cessation of hostilities between Israel and the PLO, but Israel was intent on killing as many PLO fighters as possible. Periodic U.S.-brokered ceasefires failed as Israel used the slightest provocation to resume fighting, supposedly in self-defense.

"When PLO sniper fire is followed by fourteen hours of Israeli bombardment that is stretching the definition of defensive action too far," complained Reagan, who kept the picture of a horribly burned Lebanese child on his desk in the Oval Office as a reminder of the tragedy of Lebanon.

The American public nightly witnessed the Israeli bombardment of Beirut on television news broadcasts. The pictures of dead, mutilated children caught in the Israeli artillery barrages, were particularly wrenching. Repulsed by the carnage, the U.S. public decidedly favored forcing Israel to stop.

When Reagan warned Israel of possible sanctions if its forces continued to indiscriminately attack Beirut, Israel launched a major offensive against West Beirut the next day. In the United States, Israeli supporters demanded a meeting with Reagan to press Israel's case. Though Reagan declined the meeting, one was set up for 40 leaders of various Jewish organizations with Vice President George H.W. Bush, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz.

Reagan wrote once again to Begin, reminding him that Israel was allowed to use American weapons only for defensive purposes. He appealed to Begin's humanitarianism to stop the bombardment.

The next day, in a meeting with Israeli supporters from the United States, Begin fumed that he would not be instructed by an American president or any other U.S. official. "Nobody is going to bring Israel to her knees. You must have forgotten that Jews do not kneel but to God," Begin said. "Nobody is going to preach to us humanitarianism."

More Tragedy

Begin's government also used the tragedy in Lebanon as an opportunity to provide special favors for its American backers.

In *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, New York Times correspondent Thomas L. Friedman wrote that the Israeli Army conducted tours of the battlefield for influential U.S. donors. On one occasion, women from Hadassah were taken to the hills surrounding Beirut and were invited to look down on the city as Israeli artillery put on a display for them. The artillery began an enormous barrage, with shells landing throughout the densely populated city. The shells struck and destroyed apartments, shops, homes and shacks in the squalid refugee camps of the Palestinians.

A ceasefire was finally agreed upon by Israel and the PLO, requiring Yasser Arafat and all PLO fighters to leave Lebanon. The Palestinians were assured, as part of the agreement brokered by the United States, that their wives and

children living in Lebanese refugee camps would be safe from harm. The PLO then left Lebanon by ship in August 1982, moving the PLO headquarters to Tunisia.

On Sept. 16, Israel's Christian militia allies, with Israeli military support, entered the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, and conducted a three-day campaign of rape and murder. Most of the dead with estimates varying from Israel's count of 400 to a Palestinian estimate of nearly 1,000 were women and children.

American Marines, who had been dispatched to Lebanon as peacekeepers to oversee the PLO evacuation but then had departed, hastily returned after the Sabra and Shatila massacres. They were housed in a large warehouse complex near Beirut's airport.

Over the next year, American forces found themselves drawn into the worsening Lebanese civil war. A key moment occurred on Sept. 18, 1983, when Reagan's national security adviser Robert McFarlane, who was considered a staunch supporter of Israel, ordered U.S. warships to bombard Muslim targets inside Lebanon.

As Gen. Colin Powell, then a top aide to Defense Secretary Weinberger, wrote in his memoir, "When the shells started falling on the Shiites, they assumed the American 'referee' had taken sides." [See Powell's *My American Journey*.]

Muslim attacks on the Marines in Beirut soon escalated. On Oct. 23, 1983, two Shiite Muslims drove explosives-laden trucks into two buildings in Beirut, one housing French forces and the other the Marines. The blasts killed 241 Americans and 58 French.

Over the ensuing weeks, American forces continued to suffer losses in skirmishes with Muslim militiamen near the Beirut airport and American civilians also became targets for execution and hostage-taking. On Feb. 7, 1984, Reagan announced that the Marines would be redeployed from Lebanon. Within a couple of weeks, the last of the Marines had departed Lebanon, having suffered a total of 268 killed.

However, the hostage-taking of Americans continued, ironically creating an opportunity for Israel to intercede again through its contacts in Iran to seek the help of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's regime in getting the Lebanese Shiite militants to release captured Americans.

Israeli arms dealers and neocon Americans, such as Michael Ledeen, were used as middlemen for the secret arms-for-hostages deals, which Reagan approved and McFarlane oversaw. However, the arms deliveries via Israel failed to reduce the overall number of Americans held hostage in Lebanon and were eventually exposed in November 1986, becoming Reagan's worst scandal, the Iran-Contra Affair.

Noriega and Harari

Though Israel's government had created some headaches for Reagan, it also provided some help, allowing its arms dealers and intelligence operatives to assist some of Reagan's favorite covert operations, particularly in Central America where the U.S. Congress had objected to military assistance going to human rights violators, like the Guatemalan military, and to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

As Vice President, George H.W. Bush met with Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and considered him a compliant partner. Noriega subsequently funneled financial and other help to Reagan's beloved Contras and once even volunteered to arrange the assassinations of leaders of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

One of Noriega's top operatives was Michael Harari, who had led Israeli assassination teams and who had served as the Israeli Mossad station chief in Mexico. In Panama, Harari became a key intermediary for Israeli contributions to the Contras, supplying them with arms and training, while Noriega handed over cash.

But Noriega and Harari were conducting other business in the region, allegedly working as middlemen and money launderers for the lucrative smuggling of cocaine into the United States. When that information surfaced in the U.S. news media and Noriega became notorious as an unstable thug George H.W. Bush as President found himself under enormous political pressure in 1989 to remove Noriega from power.

So, Bush prepared to invade Panama in December 1989. However, the Israeli government was concerned about the possible capture of Harari, whom U.S. prosecutors regarded as Noriega's top co-conspirator but who also was someone possessing sensitive information about Israeli clandestine activities.

Six hours before U.S. troops were to invade Panama, Harari was warned of the impending attack, an alert that enabled him to flee and may have compromised the safety of American paratroopers and Special Forces units preparing to begin the assault, units that took surprisingly heavy casualties.

Tipped off by Israeli intelligence agents, Harari was whisked away by an Israeli embassy car, flying a diplomatic flag, with diplomatic license plates to ensure he would not be stopped and held, according to an interview that I had in January 1990 with Col. Edward Herrera Hassen, commander of Panama Defense Forces.

Harari soon was on his way back to Israel, where the government has since rebuffed U.S. requests that Harari be extradited to the United States to stand

trial in connection with the Noriega case. For his part, Noriega was captured and brought to the United States where he was convicted of eight drug and racketeering charges. [Hariri died on Sept. 21, 2014, in Tel Aviv at the age of 87.]

The Lobby

The one constant in Israel's endless maneuverings both with and against the U.S. government has been the effectiveness of the Israel Lobby and its many allies to fend off sustained criticism of Israel, sometimes by smearing critics as anti-Semitic or by mounting aggressive cover-ups when investigations threatened to expose ugly secrets.

Given this long record of success, U.S. presidents and other politicians have demonstrated a declining capacity to press Israel into making concessions, the way Eisenhower, Kennedy and Carter tried to do. For instance, when President Bill Clinton first met with Netanyahu in 1996, Clinton was surprised to find himself getting a lecture from Israel's Likud prime minister. "Who the f**k does he think he is? Who's the superpower here?" a peeved Clinton was quoted as saying. [See *The Much Too Promised Land*, by Aaron Miller, an aide to Clinton.]

Joe Lockhart, then White House spokesman, told Clayton Swisher, author of *The Truth About Camp David*, that Netanyahu was "one of the most obnoxious individuals you're going to come into just a liar and a cheat. He could open his mouth and you could have no confidence that anything that came out of it was the truth."

Faced with these difficulties and fending off Republican attempts to drive him from office Clinton put off any serious push for a Middle East peace accord until the last part of his presidency. Clinton negotiated the Wye River memorandum with Netanyahu and Arafat on Sept. 23, 1999, calling for reciprocal undertakings by both sides. The agreement called for the freezing of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, but Netanyahu failed to stop the settlement activity. Demolition of Palestinian homes, restrictions on movement by Palestinians, and settlement building continued.

Ultimately, Clinton failed to achieve any breakthrough as his final efforts collapsed amid finger-pointing and distrust between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Handling Bush

Israel's hopes were buoyed further when George W. Bush entered the White House in 2001. Unlike his father who looked on the Israelis with suspicion and felt some kinship with the Arab oil states, the younger Bush was unabashedly pro-

Israel.

Though Reagan had credentialed many young neocons in the 1980s, he had kept them mostly away from Middle East policy, which usually fell to less ideological operatives such as Philip Habib and James Baker. However, George W. Bush installed the neocons in key jobs for Mideast policy, with the likes of Elliott Abrams at the National Security Council, Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith at the Pentagon, and Lewis Libby inside Vice President Dick Cheney's office.

The neocons arrived with a plan to transform the Middle East based on a scheme prepared by a group of American neocons, including Perle and Feith, for Netanyahu in 1996. Called "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," the idea was to bring to heel all the antagonistic states confronting Israel.

The "clean break" was to abandon the idea of achieving peace in the region through mutual understanding and compromise. Instead, there would be "peace through strength," including violent removal of leaders who were viewed as hostile to Israel's interests.

The plan sought the ouster of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, which was called "an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right." After Hussein's ouster, the plan envisioned destabilizing the Assad dynasty in Syria with hopes of replacing it with regime more favorable to Israel. That, in turn, would push Lebanon into Israel's arms and contribute to the destruction of Hezbollah, Israel's tenacious foe in South Lebanon.

The removal of Hezbollah in Lebanon would, in turn, weaken Iran's influence, both in Lebanon and in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, where Hamas and other Palestinian militants would find themselves cornered.

But what the "clean break" needed was the military might of the United States, since some of the targets like Iraq were too far away and too powerful to be overwhelmed even by Israel's highly efficient military. The cost in Israeli lives and to Israel's economy from such overreach would have been staggering.

The only way to implement the strategy was to enlist a U.S. president, his administration and the Congress to join Israel in this audacious undertaking. That opportunity presented itself when Bush ascended to the White House and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, created a receptive political climate in the United States.

Turning to Iraq

After a quick strike against al-Qaeda and its allies in Afghanistan, the Bush

administration turned its attention to conquering Iraq. However, even after the 9/11 attacks, the neocons and President Bush had to come up with rationales that were sellable to the American people, while playing down any suggestion that the coming conflicts were partially designed to advance Israel's interests.

So, the Bush administration put together tales about Iraqi stockpiles of WMD, its "reconstituted" nuclear weapons program, and its alleged ties to al-Qaeda and other terrorists determined to strike at the United States. The PR operation worked like a charm. Bush rallied Congress and much of the American public behind an unprovoked invasion of Iraq, which began on March 19, 2003, and drove Saddam Hussein's government from power three weeks later.

At the time, the joke circulating among neocons was where to go next, Syria or Iran, with the punch line: "Real men go to Tehran!"

Meanwhile, Israel continued collecting as much intelligence as possible from the United States about the next desired target, Iran. On Aug. 27, 2004, CBS News broke a story about an FBI investigation into a possible spy working for Israel as a policy analyst for Under Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz. The official was identified as Lawrence Franklin.

Franklin pled guilty to passing a classified Presidential Directive and other sensitive documents pertaining to U.S. foreign policy regarding Iran to the powerful Israeli lobbying group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which shared the information with Israel.

According to FBI surveillance tapes, Franklin relayed top secret information to Steve Rosen, AIPAC's policy director, and Keith Weissman, a senior policy analyst with AIPAC. On Aug. 30, 2004, Israeli officials admitted that Franklin had met repeatedly with Naor Gilon, head of the political department at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and a specialist on Iran's nuclear programs.

Franklin was sentenced to 12 years and seven months in prison for passing classified information to a pro-Israel lobby group and an Israeli diplomat. No charges were brought against the AIPAC executives or the Israeli diplomat.

Bloody Chaos

Meanwhile, back in the Middle East, it turned out that occupying Iraq was more difficult than the Bush administration had anticipated. Ultimately, more than 4,400 American soldiers died in the conflict along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

The bloody chaos in Iraq also meant that the neocon "real men" couldn't go either to Syria or Iran, at least not right away. They were forced into a

waiting game, counting on the short memories of the American people before revving up the fear machine again to justify moving to the next phase.

When the U.S. death toll finally began to decline in Iraq, the neocons stepped up their alarms about Iran becoming a danger to the world by developing nuclear weapons (although Iran has disavowed any desire to have nukes and U.S. intelligence expressed confidence in 2007 that Iran had stopped work on a warhead four years earlier).

Still, while trying to keep the focus away from its own nuclear arsenal, Israel has pushed the international community to bring pressure on Iran, in part by threatening to mount its own military attack on Iran if the U.S. government and other leading powers don't act aggressively.

The neocon anti-Iran plans were complicated by the victory of Barack Obama, who promised to reach out in a more respectful way to the Muslim world. Inside Israel and in U.S. neocon circles, complaints quickly spread about Obama's coziness with Muslims (even claims that he was a secret Muslim or anti-Semitic). Obama further antagonized the neocons and Israeli hardliners by suggesting a linkage between the festering Palestinian problem and dangers to U.S. national security, including violence against U.S. troops in the Middle East.

Netanyahu, who again had assumed the post of prime minister, and the neocons wanted U.S. policy refocused on Iran, with little attention on Israel as it continued its longstanding policy of building more and more Jewish settlements on what was once Palestinian land.

In reaction to Netanyahu's unwillingness to curb those settlements and with the announcement of more housing units during Biden's visit Obama retaliated by subjecting Netanyahu to several slights, including refusing to have photographs taken of the two of them meeting at the White House.

Obama walked out of one meeting with Netanyahu after failing to get his written promise for a concession on halting further settlement construction. Obama went to dinner alone, a very pointed insult to Netanyahu. As Obama left the meeting, he said, "Let me know if there is anything new," according to a member of Congress who was present.

Secret Pacts

For his part, Netanyahu has claimed that secret agreements with the Bush administration allow for the continued building of settlements. However, Obama said on National Public Radio that he does not consider himself bound by secret oral agreements that may have been made by President Bush.

Instead, Obama claims Israel is bound by the 2003 “Road Map” agreement which prohibits building more settlements. “I’ve said clearly to the Israelis both privately and publicly that a freeze on settlements, including natural growth, is part of these obligations,” Obama said.

Still, Obama has shied away from publicly challenging Israel on some of its most sensitive issues, such as its undeclared nuclear-weapons arsenal. Like presidents back to Nixon, Obama has participated in the charade of “ambiguity.” Even as he demanded “transparency” from other countries, Obama continued to dance around questions regarding whether Israel has nuclear weapons.

Netanyahu and Israel surely have vulnerabilities. Without America’s military, diplomatic and economic support, Israel could not exist in its present form. One-quarter of Israeli wage incomes are derived from American aid money, German reparations and various charities. Without that outside assistance, Israel’s standard of living would sink dramatically.

According to the Congressional Research Service, Israel receives \$2.4 billion a year in U.S. government grants, military assistance, loan guarantees, and sundry other sources. The United States also pays Egypt another \$2 billion to keep the peace with Israel. The combined assistance to both countries comprises nearly one half of all U.S. foreign aid assistance worldwide.

In a sense, Israel can’t be blamed for standing up for itself, especially given the long history of brutality and oppression directed against Jews. However, Israeli leaders have used this tragic history to justify their own harsh treatment of others, especially the Palestinians, many of whom were uprooted from their ancestral homes.

Over the past six decades, Israeli leaders also have refined their strategies for taking advantage of their staunchest ally, the United States. Today, with many powerful friends inside the United States and with Obama facing intense political pressure over his domestic and national security policies the Israeli government has plenty of reasons to believe that it can out-fox and outlast the current U.S. president as it did many of his predecessors.

Morgan Strong is a former professor of Middle Eastern history, and was an advisor to CBS News “60 Minutes” on the Middle East. He is author of ebook, The Israeli Lobby and Me, Bush Family History, and Hoodwinking American Presidents.

Ellsberg Sees Vietnam-Like Risks in ISIS War

Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defense Department official who leaked the Pentagon Papers exposing the Vietnam War lies, is alarmed at the many parallels between Vietnam and President Obama's new military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as Barbara Koeppel reports.

By Barbara Koeppel

At a recent talk at the National Press Club in Washington DC, Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon Papers in 1971, says he believes there's not one person in the Pentagon who would agree that President Obama can achieve his aim of destroying ISIS in Iraq and Syria with air strikes, along with training and arming local military forces.

Nor, he says, can the Administration do it even if the U.S. sends ground troops, contrary to Obama's repeated assurances.

Ellsberg described the similarities with Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the near-certainty of comparable failure. I interviewed him after his talk, and updated the discussion this week, after the U.S. airstrikes inside Syria had begun. In his Press Club talk and with me, he read from some documents, as indicated below, and cited Web-links.

Q. Why are you urging Americans to be warned by what happened in Vietnam, half a century ago?

A. Well, that was my war. That makes me pretty old. And at 83, I am. This means I know what Vietnam means as well as Iraq, unlike most members of Congress. The *New York Times* noted on Sept. 18 that only a third of those voting on authorizing American advisers, arms and trainers for Syrian rebels were in Congress the last time there was a vote on war, which was for Iraq, in 2002. It would be interesting to know what they learned from the earlier vote.

As the Times wrote, "That 2002 vote hung heavily over the six hours of debate on Tuesday and Wednesday. Several veterans of the Iraq War stood against the President's request. Older Democrats recalled with bitterness their vote to back the invasion of Iraq, a vote that ended many careers."

"The last time people took a political vote like this in this House, it was on the Iraq War," Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-California, said, "and many of my colleagues say it was the worst vote they ever took."

One member of the House who voted against the new authorization, Rep. Barbara Lee, D-California,, was the *one* member of Congress who voted against the authorization of military force (AUMF) in Afghanistan in 2001, then, as now, because there was inadequate discussion and too many questions left unanswered. And the next year, with Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, she helped organize 133 votes in the House against the AUMF 2002 on Iraq.

She says the earlier request was “an overly broad authorization which I could not vote for because it was a blank check for perpetual war.”

She was right. That authorization is still on the books, and the Obama Administration still cites it (along with the AUMF 2002), 13 years later, as sufficient authority for further escalation in Syria and Iraq. Lee says it should be repealed.

Both times Lee echoed Senators Wayne Morse, D-Oregon, and Ernest Gruening, D-Alaska, the only two members of Congress who voted against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in 1964. Morse warned that it was an unconstitutional, undated blank check for war in Vietnam, and which President Lyndon Johnson used after deceiving other senators that he would not escalate without coming back to Congress.

In 2002, the only two senators who were in office long enough to have been deceived into voting for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Senators Ted Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, and Robert Byrd, D-West Virginia,, said they were ashamed of their 1964 votes and pleaded with colleagues not to make their mistake, which they said they regretted for almost 40 years.

Twenty-one other senators listened, which, incidentally, didn't include Kennedy's junior colleague from Massachusetts, Vietnam veteran Sen. John Kerry, who had reason to regret his *yes* vote which helped lose him the presidency just two years later. I believe he will come to regret his present, shameful role with respect to this war for the rest of his life.

I have my own mistake to regret, not being the whistleblower I could have been in the Pentagon in 1964. Like Byrd and Kennedy in 2002, I'm calling on people in comparable positions to save themselves from such remorse, that they didn't do what they could to warn and inform Congress and the public now, before decisive escalations occur.

Q. How do U.S. actions in Vietnam compare with what the U.S. is doing today, with advisers in Iraq and air strikes in Iraq and Syria, to destroy ISIS?

A. There are countless parallels. As in Vietnam, the U.S. is heading towards an American ground combat war under a president who assures us, before an election,

that it isn't going to happen. And as in Vietnam, his generals claim he can't achieve his goal without boots on the ground.

Gen. Raymond Odierno, the Army Chief of Staff, says you can't defeat ISIS without ground troops. Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified he will recommend U.S. ground forces in Iraq if and when air power alone is not sufficient. That day is certain to come, sooner than later, although not before the November elections.

In fact, I doubt there's a single person in the Pentagon or the CIA who believes Obama can achieve his goals to destroy ISIS in Iraq and Syria with air strikes and advisers alone.

High-level officers can't contradict the President publicly, without resigning or being fired. But retired officials can, and have. A former Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Conway, put it succinctly: The President's current strategy "doesn't have a snowball's chance in hell" of succeeding. I'm sure Odierno and Dempsey give it the same odds.

It may be that people in the Pentagon are telling the President and each other that the U.S. can defeat ISIS if you let us do a bigger war, including sizeable numbers of American ground troops. If so, I believe they're wrong, just as the JCS were in Vietnam and the first Iraq War.

On the other hand, they may not believe that. Either way, here's where truly honest testimony to Congress is critical. And that's not likely to happen unless it's triggered by leaks from inside whistleblowers of internal, classified analyses, estimates and projections of the sort that should have occurred but didn't before the escalation in Vietnam or earlier in Iraq.

In any case, as Barbara Lee said, the consequences even of Obama's recent first steps will be to further expand our involvement in a sectarian war, without Congress considering the implications of the larger war that's coming.

Q. When generals, like Odierno, say ground troops will be needed, whose ground troops do they mean?

A. "Ideally," General Dempsey has said, they would be Iraqi, Kurdish or Syrian. But he's also said that half the Iraq army isn't competent to partner with the U.S. against ISIS. And, the other half has to be partially rebuilt and retrained. How long will that take, since the last 12 years of U.S. training failed so dramatically?

Regarding Syria, Dempsey says there will need to be 12,000 to 15,000 Syrian ground troops, properly trained by the U.S., to take back territory from ISIS.

But the President just asked, and Congress authorized, U.S. training for only 5,000 Syrian troops, which is supposed to take six months to a year or more. Who but the U.S. is going to fill that gap?

Obama's former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, dismissed these fantasies. He insists the U.S. will not succeed against ISIS "strictly from the air, or strictly depending on the Iraqi forces, or the Peshmerga [the Kurds], or the Sunni tribes acting on their own." He adds "some small number of American advisers, trainers, Special Forces and forward spotters, forward air controllers, are going to have to be in harm's way."

Q. Doesn't that contradict President Obama's assurances of "no American boots on the ground"?

A. Yes. That is almost certain to happen. And a question we should ask, based on what we know about Vietnam is "When General Dempsey recommends, and the President agrees, that U.S. advisers, trainers and air spotters should leave their bases and accompany Iraqi troops in combat getting in harm's way will we be told that's happening? If so, when?"

I vividly recall reading a memo in the Pentagon on April 6, 1965, from McGeorge Bundy, Johnson's national security adviser, that the President had authorized a change in mission for the Marines at Danang. They'd been sent there, the first American combat units in Vietnam, ostensibly to defend the base from which we were conducting air operations.

Supposedly, they were politically harmless, just "advisers", which didn't involve large U.S. casualties and get us committed the way ground combat units do. Like what we're doing now, in Iraq and Syria. But in 1965, LBJ had secretly decided as early as April 1 to allow them to leave the base for offensive patrols in the field, precisely the kinds of actions I'd been trained to lead as a rifle company platoon leader and company commander in the Marines.

The memo said, as I noted in my 1972 book, *Papers on the War*, "The President desires that premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy. The President desires that these movements and changes in combat mission should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy."

I remember writing a memo to my boss, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, that "This is dangerous. You can't keep that secret. There are reporters over there. They'll know what the Marines are doing and we'll be shown to be concealing it. You know, we're actually changing the

nature of the war. We're going to be taking over the war from the South Vietnamese. I don't think you can keep that secret very long."

I was wrong. That was April. And by July, about 100,000 troops were over there, doing offensive operations. But until then, there was no word or leak about this.

So on July 28, when President Johnson finally announced we were sending 50,000 more troops, it was actually 100,000, but he lied and said 50,000 to hide where this was heading, a reporter asked, "Mr. President, does the fact you are sending additional forces to Vietnam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard installations and to act as an emergency backup?"

Johnson answered, "It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply change of objective."

And that was true! This was the end of July. He didn't *just* change the policy. He changed it four months earlier. He just hadn't announced it.

To bring us to the present, instead of saying "relying mainly on the South Vietnamese," insert Syrians, Iraqis and Kurds. When those first steps are taken towards making this mainly an American war steps Obama and his generals and Gates already hint at should we expect to hear about that from the White House? Why? Because Obama is more transparent, less secretive than Johnson, Nixon or George W. Bush? He isn't.

During the Vietnam build-up was when I could have alerted the American people about what was happening, and I didn't. That's why I'm calling on insiders who know that we're being misled to do better.

However, the big issue now is not the combat role for advisers, intelligence and support units, Special Forces and air spotters. Rather, given the air war, it's in the cards they will be in harm's way probably before the end of the year, perhaps even *before* the election. The real issue will be the deployment of tens if not hundreds of thousands of U.S. ground troops.

And whether they total 1,600 troops on the ground, what we already have in Iraq, or 16,000 (what LBJ had in Vietnam before the start of the air war and the major ground escalation in 1965), that "small force of Americans" Gates describes won't be remotely enough to "destroy" ISIS. Both Gates and the generals know it will take a lot more. But even if the number soared to 550,000, as in Vietnam in 1968, or even a million, I believe they still won't eliminate ISIS permanently. They'll be back.

Q. Does Obama realize the generals are sure to ask him for tens of thousands or more combat troops?

A. I don't know. I suspect they've told him that, secretly. Just as Johnson knew his generals would ask for that in Vietnam, while he was still promising the electorate "no wider war" in 1964, and saying he wouldn't send American boys to do what Vietnamese boys should be doing.

Does Obama foresee right now that he's likely to grant that request? Is he, then, just kidding when he promises, over and over, that we'll defeat ISIS without his sending American combat units? Or does he think he can and will keep his military under control despite frustrating them and saddling them, as they see it, with stalemate and failure?

That's what Johnson sought to do, and to some extent did, though the war got much larger than he'd promised or even initially wanted. He gave the Chiefs just enough of what they wanted, in troop levels and bombings, to keep them from resigning, though never close to what they said was essential to succeed. He didn't really believe that meeting their full demands would make the difference, and he feared war with China. And he was right on both counts. But still, he didn't want to be accused of "losing" a region for want of "doing nothing."

He avoided that accusation, but at the cost of a lot of lives: 58,000 American and several million Vietnamese.

I suspect that same concern is driving Obama right now. I see him doing what he has to do to keep from being accused of doing "nothing." But does he really mean to stop at that? Or could he, even if he wanted to?

Gates recommends that President Obama scale down his present objective of "destroying" ISIS, which Gates describes as "very ambitious," which I translate to mean *unattainable*.

That's almost sure to happen. But even with lesser aims, like containment, or, as Gates suggests, driving ISIS out of Iraq, with embedded advisers and Special Forces alone, even with forward air spotters, this won't be enough. When Gates says it will, he's either lying about what he believes or he's a fool. And I don't think he's a fool.

I think the Joint Chiefs will recommend to Obama that he bring large numbers of American ground combat units to Iraq in the coming months. One difference from Vietnam is that in those days, when Johnson lied, saying he gave the generals everything they'd asked for and that there was no conflict between the civilians and military in the administration (as the Pentagon Papers were to reveal, year after year), the military kept their mouths shut. They hoped he would come

around to their point of view eventually, and they didn't want to preclude that by contradicting him and getting fired.

Now, many of them think that was a mistake, even a "dereliction of duty." This time, the generals will do their *own* leaking about what they asked (as happened in 2009, when Obama confronted "top secret" recommendations for a surge in Afghanistan). Will the President, as he now implies, reject their recommendation every time they make it? I think he should, but I doubt that he will, any more than LBJ did.

The public doubts it too. The latest polls show that 72 percent of the public expects him to deploy ground combat units in Iraq, contrary to his assurances. I think the generals are of the same mind. It might be almost irrelevant, the way things work, what the President himself thinks about that, privately, at this moment.

Q. Where is Congress and its powers to declare war on this? Will the Administration keep it informed about its military actions and ask for a formal vote?

A. On the day Congress voted on the Administration's request to authorize sending advisers, arms and trainers for Syrian rebel troops, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-California, said, in supporting it, the bill "is not to be confused with any authorization to go further." She said, "I will not vote for combat troops to be engaged in war."

But will she ever be *asked* by the Administration to vote on that? Every indication is that the White House believes the President can expand this war with the authority Congress granted the Executive in earlier bills, before the U.S. invaded Afghanistan or Iraq, and feels no need to come back to Congress.

Once again, that's reminiscent of Vietnam. Both the House and Senate approved the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August 1964, which authorized President Johnson to use military force without a formal declaration of war. He said he needed it to retaliate against a North Vietnamese attack on our destroyers, which, in fact, didn't happen.

At that time, Sen. William Fulbright, D-Arkansas, assured the Senate that the Administration did not intend to expand the Vietnam War without returning to Congress. But he was duped by the White House, which never again appealed to Congress for consent, and used the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as an open-ended declaration of war.

This time, the White House hasn't even *bothered* to assure Congress, however deceptively, that it concedes the need for further authorization. To the

contrary, it is asserting that the 2002 authorization of military force which was based on the Bush Administration's lies about WMDs, as blatantly as was the Tonkin Gulf Resolution is sufficient for anything the President wants to do in the Middle East, along with the even earlier AUMF of 2001.

For that same reason, Rep. Lee is now demanding a real vote on the war before it expands further. She's saying: "Don't do this again." Of the recent authorization, she said "I am reminded of the failure to have a thorough debate in the wake of 9/11, that act of atrocity, that act of terrorism, which frightened people into a very hasty and premature delegation of their powers; now we have two beheadings on television to do that and call for a revenge act "

Of this recent request, though it's much more limited than the Tonkin Gulf Resolution or the two AUMFs, she said, "The consequences of this vote, whether it's written in the amendment or not, will be a further expansion of a war currently taking place and our further involvement in a sectarian war," again "without adequate debate or any vote in Congress having to do with the larger issues here of the war."

She's right. We should be telling Nancy Pelosi to follow her counsel, and to use every constitutional power to force that vote, and precede it with adequate debate.

Q. So many ask, isn't it better to do something against ISIS – these murderers, fanatics – than do nothing? How do you answer that?

A. ISIS is not the only murderous, fanatic group in that region but they may well be the most extreme so far, and most successful. But that's a reason for not doing *something* that actually strengthens them in their rivalry with others. But that's exactly what we *are* doing, with our airpower.

Even before the Syrian airstrikes, FBI Director James Comey testified on Sept. 17 that ISIS' "widespread use of social media and growing online support intensified following the commencement of U.S. air strikes in Iraq."

Another news report, in the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, states, 'The Islamic State jihadist organization has recruited more than 6,000 new fighters since America began targeting the group with air strikes last month, according to the U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. At least 1,300 of the new recruits are said to be foreigners, who have joined IS from outside the swathes of Syria and Iraq that it controls.'

Do we think ISIS hasn't noticed this? We have to ask, why does ISIS want to show off its public beheadings of Americans on international television? Our ally Saudi Arabia doesn't televise its beheadings, 19 in August, one for sorcery, nor

do our favored rebels, the Free Syrian Army.

But ISIS chose exactly now to boast them to the world. Why? Because they need and welcome U.S. air strikes and the flood of recruits they bring, despite the losses ISIS has to expect. Getting the U.S. to publicize ISIS as the number one American enemy, while U.S. airstrikes are killing Muslim civilians along with ISIS troops and leaders, stamps ISIS as leading the fight against the U.S. and its allied Arab regimes that ISIS believes are infidels.

I watched this happen in Vietnam. Each time we bombed a village in South Vietnam, the young men who survived the attack joined the Viet Cong. In fact, the VC would fire on American planes from a village precisely for that reason. They could count on the retaliatory bombing, and the recruits. I wrote a report for the RAND Corporation about that when I came back, with the title, "Revolutionary Judo."

History repeated itself in Iraq and Afghanistan, where Matthew Hoh the Marine and then senior State Department official who served in both countries and who resigned his post saw exactly the same thing.

As I noted before, by doing this *something*, we're strengthening ISIS and making things worse. But that's nothing new. Indeed, all the military actions and expenditures of the last 13 years in the Middle East have led to creating, strengthening and expanding ISIS and other militant groups. It's time to stop.

As Sen. Joe Manchin III, D-West Virginia, said to his colleagues, "Our past experience, after 13 years, everything that we have tried to do has not proven to be at all beneficial. So what makes you think it's going to be different this time? What makes you think we can ask a group of Islamists to agree with Americans to fight another group of Islamists, as barbaric as they may be?"

With the air strikes in Syria, we are radicalizing moderates who then join ISIS, as the *New York Times* has noted. It has also allowed Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, who led the fight against ISIS until now, to stop his air strikes against it and concentrate on the *moderate* rebels we support who oppose both Assad and ISIS. Why is he doing this? Because the U.S. is attacking ISIS, doing his work for him. Then, if he can take moderates off the board, he calculates the U.S. will have to accept him as the only effective ally against ISIS.

Q. What *can* we do that would be useful?

A. Since ISIS won't be stopped with military actions alone, not ours or those of groups that join us, including Iraqis and Syrians, and are in fact counter-productive, we should have learned that if there's ever to be an answer, it has to be largely diplomatic.

In particular, this could mean changing our close relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Mideast allies whose citizens and regimes have long been financing and supplying ISIS and other radical groups at the same time they provide pilots whose attacks also help strengthen ISIS. If we ceased tolerating that ideological and financial support for extremists, this would be a major step to containing and eroding ISIS. But I doubt this will happen.

Serious diplomacy would also mean changing our relationship with Russia and Iran, exploring through direct negotiations the positive contributions they could make to stabilize the region, rather than, as at present, demonizing them.

This, too, isn't likely. But if we don't face what we need to do to escape the madness we suffered and inflicted in Vietnam and Iraq, we will be mired in war in the Middle East for decades.

Q. There are posters of you around Washington DC urging those with inside information about the Pentagon's plans, to leak it. The headline is: "Don't Do What I Did." What do you hope will happen?

A. In 1964 and 1965, the lack of whistleblowers caused Vietnam to happen. I was in the Pentagon then and didn't come forward with what I knew. So I helped Vietnam happen. I very much regret that I didn't provide information when it would have done the most good, when Congress was voting on this and when the escalation was occurring. In 2002 and 2003, the lack of a Manning or Snowden with high-level access caused Iraq.

Actually, in 1964, many in the Pentagon could have put out the information the public and Congress needed to know. Not random documents. Just one drawer of selected documents showing that President Johnson was deceiving people and leading them into a hopeless war that his own Joint Chiefs believed could never be won at the level he was willing to do it. (The heart of the Pentagon Papers took up about one drawer of a top secret safe in my office at RAND, or earlier in my office in the Pentagon).

I'm sure that comparable documents exist in safes in Washington and Arlington and McLean, Virginia, right now. I'm just as sure that dozens if not hundreds of insiders could provide the information in those documents from their own safes to Congress and the public, if they're willing to take the risks.

In 1971, after I put out the Pentagon Papers, Sen. Morse told me that if I had given him the documents from my Pentagon safe while he was on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1964, "The Tonkin Gulf Resolution would never have come out of Committee. And if they bypassed the committee and sent it to the floor, the resolution would never have passed."

That put a lot of weight on my shoulders, not unfairly. I'm urging insiders now to do better than I did then, and now is the time.

Q. What do you and ExposeFacts.org aim to do?

A. To encourage whistle-blowing that will lead people to press their congressional representatives, this month, while they're in their home districts campaigning for votes, to demand hearings, debates and a vote in an effort to block continued and escalated U.S. military involvement in Middle East conflicts.

Just a year ago, constituents did almost exactly that, button-holing representatives at home in their districts to demand "No war on Syria!" The effect on Congress was electrifying, perhaps unprecedented.

It confronted a President who was committed to an attack at the end of August, because of gas attacks in Syria whose perpetrators are still a murky and controversial topic, and who had just remembered that he was head of the "world's oldest republic" with a duty to get consent from Congress to go to war. Indeed, he could have lost the vote in both Houses. That caused him to make a sharp turn and embrace a Russian proposal to eliminate Assad's gas menace by peaceful, negotiated means.

We need something like that now. Unlikely as it is, after the ISIS gains, the public beheadings, and, not mentioned by the President before our air attacks but quickly labeled a critical target, the emergence of the dreaded "Khorasan."

On Khorasan we need serious investigative reporting, fueled by whistleblowing. Could the "classified" leaks about Khorasan just before and after the Syrian airstrikes, a group allegedly more of an imminent danger to the U.S. than ISIS, be designed to manipulate the media and public? Could they be a fraud, just as the all-too-successful fraudulent, authorized classified leaks in 2002 about Saddam Hussein's supposed nuclear cylinders? Did these recent Khorasan leaks provide a self-defense motive for U.S. air attacks on Syria?

They sound eerily like the alleged Aug. 4, 1964 "attack" on our destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf, 50 years ago this August, an attack that never happened, which gave us the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and 11 years of war. Is there really solid evidence, as Administration officials have claimed and others leaked, of "an advanced state of planning" for imminent attacks on U.S. airliners, by a group called Khorasan or by any other? Or might it have been a hoax like that floated by the Bush Administration as Dick Cheney picked up various forgeries and fantasies, to justify our aggression against Iraq 12 years ago?

Could this administration really be re-playing the Bush and Johnson script that

closely? And the media applauding the performance just as credulously?

Glenn Greenwald and Murtazsa Hussain make a strong case for this with Khorasan. This cries out for leaked or congressionally-demanded documents.

As the posters put up by ExposeFacts.org say, and one is quite near the Iraq embassy, "Don't wait until a new war has started. Don't wait until thousands more have died before you tell the truth with documents that reveal lies or crimes or internal projections of costs and dangers. You might save a war's worth of lives."

State Department, Pentagon, CIA, NSA or White House staff who follow that advice will risk unjust prosecution under the Espionage Act, as I did. Unjust because the Espionage Act was designed to deter or punish spies, not whistleblowers. It was never intended to be used against disclosures to the American public, and never used that way until my own prosecution, which was the first in American history for a leak.

Legal scholars argued then that it was an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment to use the Espionage Act against whistleblowers. It's unjust because it doesn't allow defendants to tell the jury and public about their motives. [See Melville B. Nimmer, "National Security Issues v. Free Speech: The Issues Left Undecided in the Ellsberg Case," *Stanford Law Review* (vol. 26, No. 2, January 1974, 311-333).]

Treating sources of leaks, classified or not, like spies, is exactly what's happened under President Obama, who has brought more Espionage Act indictments for leaking than any other president, in fact, more than all of them together. And he's leaving that precedent to his successors.

The risk whistleblowers take is very great. That's why I think they should remain anonymous, if possible. ExposeFact.org, which sponsored the Washington press conference and encourages whistleblowers, proposes to facilitate their anonymity by the use of encryption.

There will always be a risk of identification, and if classified information is involved (even if it's evidence of Executive Branch crimes or other malfeasance), there will likely be prosecutions. Until Congress rescinds the wording of certain clauses in the Espionage Act and passes laws to defend the public interest, or as Harvard Law Professor Yochai Benkler proposes to call it, a "public accountability defense," they will probably be convicted. They could suffer years in prison, perhaps a life sentence, as I faced (a possible 115 years) but escaped on grounds of governmental criminal misconduct. Chelsea Manning faced the risks and now is serving 35 years. [See Benkler's recent

article, "A Public Accountability Defense for National Security Leakers and Whistleblowers," *Harvard Law and Policy Review*, Vol. 8, Summer 2014.]

A heavy prospect. Worth considering only for the grimmest of circumstances. But we face them now, when a war's worth of lives might yet be saved by courageous, patriotic truth-telling.

John Kerry, as a young, just-returned Vietnam veteran, was admired by many as an outstanding whistleblower, with his unsparing account of U.S. war crimes in testimony on April 22, 1971, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. That's when he famously asked, "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

As things are now heading, he will not have to ask that of an American soldier in Iraq or Syria while Secretary of State. Nor will President Obama The last American combat death there is not now remotely possible within the next two, four or even eight years.

The Pentagon is reported to be planning for a campaign of 36 months, but I don't think Obama's and Kerry's successors will be any more ready over the next decade to admit a mistake.

The final American casualty, or last deaths inflicted in the Middle East by Americans, will not come about unless the American people tell Congress and the Executive what Lt. John Kerry said to the Senate in 1971, speaking for the newly-formed Vietnam Veterans Against the War: "We want this to stop."

Barbara Koepfel is a freelance investigative reporter based in Washington DC.

Fleshing Out Nixon's Vietnam 'Treason'

Exclusive: Out of the Watergate scandal came a favorite mainstream media saying: "the cover-up is always worse than the crime." But the MSM didn't understand what the real crime was or why President Nixon was so desperate, as James DiEugenio explains in reviewing Ken Hughes's *Chasing Shadows*.

By James DiEugenio

One of America's great political mysteries continues to come into sharper focus: Did Richard Nixon sabotage President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks in 1968 to win that election and did Nixon's fear of exposure lead him to create the burglary team that got caught at Watergate in 1972?

Pieces of this puzzle began to fall into place even in real time as Beverly Deepe, the Christian Science Monitor's Saigon reporter, got wind of Nixon's treachery before the 1968 election although her editors spiked her article when they couldn't get confirmation in Washington. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Almost Scoop on Nixon's 'Treason.'](#)"]

In the ensuing years, other journalists and historians began assembling the outlines of Nixon's peace-talk sabotage with the story getting its first big splash of attention when Seymour Hersh made reference to it in his 1983 biography of Henry Kissinger, *The Price of Power*.

Then, in 2012, investigative reporter Robert Parry discovered that Johnson's long-missing file on Nixon's 1968 operation, which was later turned over to the Johnson library, helped explain another mystery: why Nixon launched his Plumbers' operation in 1971 and thus set in motion a series of burglaries that led to the Watergate scandal in 1972.

Nixon had been told by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that Johnson had evidence from wiretaps about Nixon's peace-talk sabotage, but an alarmed Nixon couldn't find the file whose absence became critical after the Pentagon Papers' history of the Vietnam War was leaked in 1971. Nixon knew there was a potential sequel somewhere that could end his presidency. [See Robert Parry's [America's Stolen Narrative](#).]

Now, journalist Ken Hughes, a resident scholar at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia, has filled out the story even more in his new book, *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair and the Origins of Watergate*.

Johnson's Peace Initiative

Hughes begins his book with the dramatic day of March 31, 1968, when President Johnson announced on national television that he would not run for reelection that fall. Or, as he put it, "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

But Johnson said something else: he intended to end the Vietnam War before leaving the White House. Since his election in 1964, Johnson had overseen a massive military escalation of the war, inserting 550,000 American troops in theater and ordering the greatest bombing campaign in the history of warfare, called "Rolling Thunder."

Despite all the carnage, Johnson finally concluded that a military victory in Vietnam was illusory. He therefore announced a limited bombing halt over 90 percent of North Vietnam and promised a complete bombing halt if the North

Vietnamese would show some reciprocal restraint.

Though many Vietnam War critics were dubious about Johnson's peace initiative, the historical record is now clear that Johnson was sincere about his plan. He wanted peace talks to begin as soon as possible. He was seeking a U.S. exit strategy.

As Hughes notes, there had always been advisers around Johnson who told him it was futile to fight in Vietnam. As early as 1964, Sen. Richard Russell, D-Georgia, advised his former protégé, "It isn't important a damn bit. I never did want to get messed up down there. I do not agree with those brain trusters who say this thing has tremendous strategic and economic value and that we'll lose everything if we lose Vietnam."

Russell said the problem was how to get out of Vietnam without looking weak, a dilemma that Johnson a classic Cold Warrior who believed in the Domino Theory could not overcome. But the war's futility and its political damage had become apparent to Johnson by the time of the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive in January-February 1968, leading to his decision to withdraw from the presidential race and his plan to end the war.

Johnson also sought to be fair to the major candidates running to replace him: Vice President Hubert Humphrey, former Vice President Richard Nixon and independent candidate, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama. Johnson promised to keep them equally informed of developments in the peace process. And, Hughes writes, that as far as the declassified record reveals, Johnson kept that promise.

Nixon's Dilemma

But the political problem from Johnson's peace initiative soon grew acute for Nixon, who remained bitter about his narrow loss to John Kennedy in 1960. During the late summer of 1968, Nixon had a big lead over Humphrey, swelling to about 15 points after the disastrous Democratic convention in Chicago.

But Nixon recognized that the Democrats were likely to unify especially if the anti-war faction thought that Johnson was making progress on a peace deal. Humphrey also began reaching out to disaffected Democrats with increasingly clear overtures on resolving the war. If Johnson could deliver on a full bombing halt and the start of a U.S. withdrawal, Nixon might again be denied his dream of the presidency.

Whatever one thinks of Richard Nixon, the man had the (deserved) reputation of a consummate infighter in the political arena. This went back to his smearing of Congressman Jerry Voorhis in 1946, his 1948-50 destruction of State Department diplomat Alger Hiss from Nixon's seat on the House Committee on Un-American

Activities, and his tarring of senatorial candidate Helen Gahagan Douglas in 1950. In fact, on now-declassified Nixon tapes that Hughes cited, Nixon admits that he unethically had access to grand jury proceedings against Hiss, and he used them to convict Hiss in the press before trial.

Thus, Nixon might have viewed Johnson's peace initiative as just one more political obstacle to overcome. And Nixon had in his campaign apparatus people like China Lobby figure Anna Chennault who could sink Johnson's negotiations by getting the South Vietnamese government to stay away from the Paris talks.

Anna Chennault was the widow of legendary Flying Tigers pilot Claire Chennault, who was 32 years her senior when they were married in 1947. The Chennaults were part of the China Lobby, the campaign that smeared President Harry Truman and the Democrats for "losing China" to the communists in 1949. The Chennaults also suffered financially with the fall of China since they were planning on running the CIA-related airline Civil Air Transport under Chiang Kai-shek, but the operation was forced to move to Taiwan.

The Chennaults and the China Lobby were quite effective in portraying the Democrats as being soft on communism in the 1952 election. Chennault died in 1958 but his widow remained active in Republican politics and in Washington's social life. She rented a suite at the Watergate Hotel and became a founder of the Flying Tiger Line, a freight loading operation.

Helping Nixon

Because of her political effectiveness, her wealth and her status as a woman ethnic, Anna Chennault became involved in the 1968 Nixon campaign under campaign chief John Mitchell. She was co-chair of the Women's Advisory Committee and raised over \$250,000 for Nixon, the top sum by a female fundraiser.

By early July 1968, Anna Chennault was already in contact with Bui Diem, the South Vietnamese ambassador to the United States, about her work for the Nixon camp, according to a memo by Nixon's foreign policy adviser Richard Allen, cited by Hughes.

In her 1980 memoir, *The Education of Anna*, Chennault also described a meeting in New York City involving herself, Bui Diem, Nixon and Mitchell on July 12, 1968, a get-together corroborated by Bui Diem's memoir, *In the Jaws of History*. At this meeting, Nixon anointed Anna Chennault, "the sole representative between the Vietnamese government and the Nixon campaign headquarters."

As the back-channel between the Nixon campaign and the South Vietnamese government, Chennault passed a series of messages to Bui Diem, President Thieu and other senior officials in Saigon essentially promising them a better deal if

Nixon won. Chennault told Thieu through Diem that Johnson's peace talks were simply a ploy to get Humphrey elected president and that Humphrey opposed the Americanization of the war.

Chennault indicated that Nixon favored more direct American intervention, an appealing message to convey to Thieu because without U.S. support, Thieu's regime could not last long against the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese.

Nixon's Assurances

While Nixon was putting in motion his plan to disrupt the peace talks, Johnson continued to brief all three candidates. On July 26, Johnson told them that he was pushing to have a four-point negotiation at the table, involving the U.S., North Vietnam, Thieu's government and the National Liberation Front (NLF), the political arm of the Viet Cong.

Nixon assured Johnson that he was in full support of the peace initiative and that the President's emissaries in Paris should be able to speak with the confidence and authority of the U.S. government. Nixon said nothing should be done in the political arena that might undermine the effort.

Hughes shows Nixon's hypocritical side again when he points to Nixon's acceptance speech at the GOP convention in Miami in August, saying: "We all hope that there's a chance that current negotiations may bring an honorable end to that war, *and we will say nothing during this campaign that might destroy that chance.*" (italics added)

Meanwhile, Humphrey trying to rebuild the shattered Democratic unity began to suggest that peace was possible and that U.S. troops could be coming home as early as 1969. Johnson responded by saying that although everyone hoped to see the day the troops come home no one could predict when that day would come. He added, "We are there to bring an honorable, stable peace to Southeast Asia, and no less will justify the sacrifices that our men have died for."

Later, Humphrey went even further, saying he would stop the bombing for good in return for good-faith negotiations from the North. Though Humphrey's public peace talk annoyed Johnson, it helped the Vice President cut into Nixon's once-formidable lead what had been a 15-point margin shrank to 8 points. The stakes for Nixon were raised.

The first warning that Johnson got about Nixon's sabotage of the peace talks came from Wall Street. In late October, banker Alexander Sachs told State Department official Eugene Rostow that Nixon was alerting his allies on Wall Street that he had a plan to "block" Johnson's peace talks and they should place their investment bets accordingly. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Profiting Off](#)

Nixon's Vietnam 'Treason.'"]

Thieu's Resistance

When Eugene Rostow's information was passed to Johnson by his national security aide Walt Rostow (Eugene's brother), Johnson had just learned that South Vietnamese President Thieu had decided not to send a delegation to Paris to negotiate.

Johnson also had a second source who revealed that Mitchell, Nixon's campaign manager, was working to frustrate Johnson's attempt at peace talks and a truce. Mitchell had been heard to say words to the effect that they would foul up these peace talks as they had frustrated Johnson's attempt to make Abe Fortas the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Johnson revealed this information to his friend Sen. Russell in a phone conversation. Johnson said he had ways to confirm whether or not the rumors were true. What he meant was that he could use the surveillance powers of the FBI, CIA and NSA to monitor certain communications necessary to carry out the subversion of the peace process.

Johnson did just that. The NSA placed a bug inside Ambassador Bui Diem's office in Washington, and the CIA did the same in the office of President Thieu in Saigon. Even though Hughes writes that these partially declassified cables are still heavily redacted, it's clear from them that Johnson told Russell that Anna Chennault was in contact with Bui Diem. LBJ was convinced she was the go-between from the Nixon camp to the South Vietnamese representatives.

NSA intercepts revealed that Ambassador Bui Diem told Thieu that the longer the situation dragged out the more it would favor the Republicans and South Vietnam. Bui Diem added that he was in direct contact with the Nixon entourage, which meant, of course, Chennault.

In fact, the FBI knew that Chennault had visited Bui Diem at the embassy on Oct. 30 for 30 minutes. Besides the wiretap, Johnson ordered the FBI to report on anyone entering or leaving the embassy and to tail Chennault. He also wanted her phone tapped at the Watergate, but the FBI didn't go that far.

Trying to pressure Nixon to back off, Johnson called Republican Senate Leader Everett Dirksen and asserted that he (Johnson) knew what was going on. "I really think it's a little dirty pool for Dick's people to be messing with the South Vietnamese ambassador and carrying messages around to both of them, and I don't think the [American] people would approve of it if it were known," Johnson told Dirksen with the implicit threat to expose publicly what Johnson privately called Nixon's "treason."

Hughes writes that Johnson never told Humphrey specifically about what Chennault was doing. He only mentioned some interference from the "China Lobby" and "Nixon's entourage." Nor did Johnson show Humphrey the intelligence cables he had from the FBI, NSA, and CIA.

The Final Days

Despite Johnson's warning to Dirksen, Chennault did not stand down. On Nov. 2, just three days before the election, another embassy message was intercepted revealing that she told Ambassador Bui Diem to convey to his superiors, "hold on, we are gonna win."

Thieu followed up by telling the South Vietnamese legislature that he would boycott the negotiations. At the same time, Nixon announced that he had been assured that the peace talks would begin. The combination of the two public announcements made Johnson look like either a con man or someone who had lost control of his own negotiations (which he had).

On Sunday, Nov. 3, Johnson asked Nixon about his knowledge of the Republican interference, and Nixon told Johnson that he was fully behind the President's efforts to bring the war to an end as quickly as possible. Nixon would lie about his role in the sabotage to the end.

There was one last twist to the story, playing out the day before the election. The Christian Science Monitor's Saigon correspondent Beverly Deepe filed a story based on her local sources describing the Republican gambit to prevent the peace talks. In Washington, the Monitor's Saville Davis ran Deepe's information past Bui Diem, who denied it, and then past the White House.

President Johnson considered confirming the story but consulted with several of his top advisers national security adviser Walt Rostow, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Defense Secretary Clark Clifford who all urged him to stay silent. Clifford warned that if the story was published and Nixon still won, Nixon might be unable to lead the country. With the White House declining comment, the Monitor decided not to go with Deepe's scoop.

Humphrey ended up losing the election by less than one point in the popular vote, leaving history to ponder the painful question of whether the disclosure of Nixon's operation might have cost him the election and brought the war to an end years earlier saving countless lives.

The Watergate Tie-in

But there was another reason to expose Nixon's covert operation. Hughes concurs with journalist Robert Parry's revelations two years ago that it was probably

Nixon's awareness of Johnson's knowledge about the sabotage that inspired the formation of the Plumbers and set the stage for the Watergate scandal which destroyed Nixon's presidency.

After Nixon won the election in 1968, FBI Director Hoover flew to New York for a private conference with Nixon and his chief of staff H. R. Haldeman. During the meeting, Hoover revealed the bugging operation ordered by Johnson over the Chennault affair. But the Director exaggerated its extent, claiming that the FBI had bugged Nixon's campaign plane, which was not true. Hoover also said the FBI had wiretapped Chennault's phone at her home, which Johnson had sought but which was not done.

There could have been a reason for Hoover's falsehoods. By claiming that Nixon's plane had been bugged, Hoover may have wanted Nixon to believe that he himself had been caught on tape directly implicated in the sabotage scheme. That could have led Nixon to think that Hoover had something politically lethal on him. By hyping the story, Hoover also undercut one of his younger FBI rivals, Cartha "Deke" DeLoach, by telling Nixon that some of the bugging had been DeLoach's idea.

What Nixon didn't know was that Johnson removed the Chennault file when he left office in January 1969 and entrusted the top-secret information to Walt Rostow, rather than ship it to the Johnson presidential library in Austin, Texas. The missing file and the paranoia instilled in Nixon by Hoover's exaggerated account had huge consequences for history.

When Nixon took office he assigned Haldeman to find the Chennault file, a task that was passed on to Thomas Charles Huston, who later became famous for the Huston Plan proposing more domestic surveillance of leftist anti-war groups. Huston's recommendations went too far even for Hoover. But Huston's work on national security issues made him a natural for Haldeman's assignment to locate the Chennault file.

Huston couldn't find the file but believed that some of the information about why the peace talks had failed might have ended up in a Defense Department study supervised by Clifford, Paul Warnke and Leslie Gelb. When Gelb left office for the Brookings Institution, he supposedly took the report with him, Huston believed. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["An Insider's View of Nixon's 'Treason.'"](#)]

Confusion Reigns

As Hughes notes, this information conveyed by Huston seems, at best, garbled. It more accurately describes the Pentagon Papers, which Gelb was actually involved in, rather than the Chennault affair, which Gelb had no role in. But even though

Huston's information was dubious on its face, Haldeman conveyed it to Nixon, who predictably replied: "I want that goddamn Gelb material and I don't care how you get it!"

But as yet, Nixon lacked his own team for conducting illegal break-ins. So, the issue of the missing Chennault material was pushed to the proverbial back burner. But an historic event in 1971 returned this concern to the center of Nixon's paranoid mind.

On June 13, 1971, the *New York Times* started publishing the Pentagon Papers, a secret study of the Vietnam War commissioned by former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara tracing the conflict from its beginning to 1967. The American public was suddenly riveted by disclosures about how various presidents, mostly Democrats, had deceived the country about the Vietnam War.

Four days later, Nixon returned to the issue of the missing file and the possibility that Gelb had taken it to the Brookings Institution and placed it in the think tank's safe. On June 17, 1971, Nixon summoned Haldeman and national security advisor Henry Kissinger into the Oval Office and pleaded with them again to locate the missing file. "Do we have it?" Nixon asked Haldeman. "I've asked for it. You said you didn't have it."

Haldeman: "We can't find it."

Kissinger: "We have nothing here, Mr. President."

Nixon: "Well, damnit, I asked for that because I need it."

Nixon then added that he wanted a break-in of Brookings "implemented. Goddamnit, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it."

On June 30, 1971, Nixon again berated Haldeman about the need to break into Brookings and "take it [the file] out." Nixon even suggested using former CIA officer E. Howard Hunt to conduct the Brookings break-in. "You talk to Hunt," Nixon told Haldeman. "I want the break-in."

Nixon's Paranoia

From here in the book, Hughes draws a portrait of a man who is a victim of his own past and his own prejudices. Nixon begins to compare those who leaked the Pentagon Papers with the communist conspiracy he railed about back in his HUAC days.

Feeling under pressure regarding leaks or potential leaks Nixon starts scheming about leaking negative information about former Democratic icons. He wanted to get the goods on Franklin Roosevelt's prior knowledge about the Japanese attack

on Pearl Harbor. Nixon wanted files on President Kennedy because he thought there might be some dirt about the Bay of Pigs fiasco or the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In effect, Nixon wanted a dual-track program: 1.) He wanted to break into private institutions to save himself from potential political damage from the Chennault affair, and 2.) He wanted to disclose damaging classified materials on the Democrats, possibly to muddy the waters just in case his 1968 peace talk sabotage was exposed.

Nixon soon brought onboard Hunt to oversee the creation of a Special Investigations Unit, better known as the Plumbers. The unit would be governed from above by Nixon, Haldeman, and White House aide John Ehrlichman, but it would have support from the FBI and the CIA.

At this point, with the Plumbers formed and their target list forming, Hughes reveals another Nixon pathology: his hatred of the Harvard People. Nixon did not come from a privileged background and did not get into an Ivy League college. He seemed to resent those who did, like Hiss, Kennedy and Roosevelt.

Nixon began to demand head counts in certain agencies of government like Treasury and Justice of, respectively, Jews and Ivy Leaguers. Incredibly, his subordinates actually compiled these counts. Fred Malek was put in charge of finding the Jewish cabal inside government after Nixon said, "I really feel that I want the Jews checked."

In a conversation with White House counsel Chuck Colson about the Treasury Department, Nixon said: "Well. Listen are they all Jews over there?" Colson replied, "Every one of them. Well, a couple of exceptions." This conversation concludes with Nixon saying that they have to find a man who is not Jewish to control the Jews in the administration.

Haldeman later wrote that he understood the dark pathology of Nixon's mind and would not follow through on some of his wilder demands. The problem, as Haldeman saw it, was that Colson would. Colson and Nixon would then do things that Haldeman would not know about until afterwards. In other words, Colson enabled the worst in Nixon.

Acting on Nixon's worst impulses, Colson and G. Gordon Liddy, a leader of the Plumbers, thought up a wild scheme to burglarize Brookings in pursuit of the missing file. They would first firebomb the building. Then, after the fire engines were called in, a burglary team would take advantage of the confusion and bust open the safe.

But after John Caulfield and Anthony Ulasewicz, veteran detectives working for

Nixon, heard about the scheme, they counseled against it and Ehrlichman canceled the operation. As Hughes notes, Ehrlichman then lied under oath about Nixon's approval of the project, which was the only burglary that Nixon clearly authorized on tape.

On to Watergate

Still, the Plumbers continued to undertake other illegal break-ins, including rifling files and planting bugs inside the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee in late May 1972. When five burglars returned on June 17, 1972, to do more espionage, they were caught by Washington D.C. police, setting in motion the Watergate scandal. That, in turn, created a constitutional crisis as Nixon refused to surrender his White House tapes to investigators.

On July 24, 1974, when the U.S. Supreme Court ordered Nixon to surrender the tapes, it spelled the doom for Nixon's presidency by corroborating allegations from ex-White House counsel John Dean and others that Nixon had overseen a criminal cover-up of the Watergate break-in. Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, 1974.

However, Nixon's sabotage of Johnson's peace talks although it may have extended the war for four years and caused the deaths of some 20,000 U.S. soldiers and a million Vietnamese never received the attention that the Watergate cover-up did. Nor has Official Washington ever come to grips with the new evidence suggesting that the two scandals were actually one.

Hughes ends the book deftly. In the David Frost interviews with Nixon in 1977, Frost asked him about the Chennault affair. Nixon replied that he did nothing to undercut Johnson's attempts at negotiations. About Chennault's interference, he said that he did not authorize these attempts at subterfuge.

Building on the investigative work of Robert Parry and other researchers, Ken Hughes has written a well-documented, incisive and hard-hitting book. He takes us up close to a man who never should have been president and who appears to have gotten into the White House through an act approaching treason. Nixon then lied about the crime for the rest of his life.

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

The Heinous Crime Behind Watergate

Exclusive: The mainstream media's big takeaway from Richard Nixon's Watergate resignation is that "the cover-up is always worse than the crime." But that's because few understand the crime behind Watergate, Nixon's frantic search for a file on his 1968 subversion of Vietnam peace talks, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

To fully understand the Watergate scandal, which led to President Richard Nixon's resignation 40 years ago, you have to know the back story starting in 1968 when candidate Nixon took part in a secret maneuver to scuttle the Vietnam peace talks and salvage a narrow victory over Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

In essence, what Nixon and his campaign team did was to contact South Vietnamese leaders behind President Lyndon Johnson's back and promise them a better deal if they stayed away from Johnson's Paris peace talks, which President Nguyen van Thieu agreed to do. So, with Johnson's peace talks stymied and with Nixon suggesting that he had a secret plan to end the war, Nixon edged out Humphrey.

After his election, Nixon learned from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that President Johnson had amassed a detailed file on what Johnson called Nixon's "treason," but Nixon couldn't locate the file once he took office and ordered an intensive search for the material that explained why the Paris peace talks had failed. But the material stayed missing.

Nixon's worries grew more acute in mid-June 1971 when the New York Times and other major U.S. newspapers began publishing the Pentagon Papers leaked by former Defense Department official Daniel Ellsberg. Though the Pentagon Papers covering the years 1945 through 1967 exposed mostly Democratic deceptions, Nixon knew something that few others did, that there was a potential sequel that could be even more explosive than the original.

By mid-1971, an increasingly angry and radical anti-war movement was challenging Nixon's continuation of the conflict. In early May, a series of demonstrations had sought to shut down Washington. Some 12,000 protesters were arrested, many confined at RFK Stadium in a scene suggesting national disorder.

In June, the Pentagon Papers further fueled the anti-war fury by revealing many of the lies that had led the nation into the bloody Vietnam quagmire. So, Nixon recognized the political danger if someone revealed how Nixon's pre-election maneuvers in 1968 had prevented President Johnson from bringing the war to an end. Nixon became desperate to get his hands on the missing report (or file)

about the failed peace talks.

In a series of tape-recorded meetings beginning on June 17, 1971, Nixon ordered a break-in (or even a fire-bombing) at the Brookings Institution where some Nixon insiders believed the missing material might be hidden in the safe.

"I want it implemented," Nixon fumed to his senior aides, Henry Kissinger and H.R. "Bob" Haldeman. "Goddamnit, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it."

On June 30, 1971, Nixon returned to the topic, berating Haldeman about the lack of action and suggesting that a team be formed under former CIA officer E. Howard Hunt to conduct the Brookings break-in. "You talk to Hunt," Nixon told Haldeman. "I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You're to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in. Just go in and take it. Go in around 8:00 or 9:00 o'clock."

There was even talk about fire-bombing the centrist Washington think tank, but the break-in never apparently happened, although Brookings' historians say there was an attempted break-in during that time frame. The historians also say that Brookings never possessed the missing file or report.

Nevertheless, Nixon and his advisers had crossed an important Rubicon, creating a team of burglars who would become known as the Plumbers.

This team, under Hunt's command, would break into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist seeking information to discredit the whistleblower and into the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate building on May 28, 1972, to plant bugs and rifle through files. On June 17, 1972, when the team returned to the Watergate to plant more bugs, five of the burglars were arrested by Washington police.

Though Nixon and his team were able to keep a lid on the scandal until the November election, which he won handily over Sen. George McGovern, the cover-up eventually proved to be Nixon's undoing. As investigators closed in on Nixon's use of hush money and other obstructions, some insiders, such as White House counsel John Dean, began to talk.

When Congress learned that Nixon had taped many of his Oval Office conversations, the President faced demands for these recordings, which Nixon fought furiously to protect. Eventually, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the tapes be turned over and Nixon's political fate was sealed. On Aug. 8, 1974, he announced to the nation that he would resign and, on Aug. 9, he signed the official papers and departed from the White House aboard a Marine helicopter.

But the mistaken lesson that the U.S. mainstream media derived from the scandal was that “the cover-up is always worse than the crime,” a silly saying that reflected the media’s ignorance about what the underlying crime was. In this case, the historical record now shows that Nixon set the Watergate scandal in motion in 1971 out of fear that perhaps his greatest crime would be exposed how he sabotaged Vietnam peace talks to gain a political edge in an election.

Of the 58,000, U.S. soldiers who died in Vietnam more than 20,000 died during Nixon’s presidency. Possibly a million more Vietnamese died in the Nixon years. But, in the end, Nixon accepted a peace deal in late 1972 similar to what Johnson was negotiating in 1968. And the final outcome was not changed. After U.S. troops departed, the South Vietnamese government soon fell to the North and the Vietcong.

The Missing File

Several years ago, I located the missing file at the LBJ Library in Austin, Texas. Before leaving office in January 1969, Johnson had ordered his national security adviser Walt Rostow to take the top secret material out of the White House with instructions to hold it until after Johnson died and then decide what to do with it.

Rostow labeled the file “The X-Envelope” and retained possession until after Johnson’s death on Jan. 22, 1973, just two days after Nixon began his second term. Eventually, Rostow decided to turn over the file to the LBJ Library with instructions to keep it sealed for at least 50 years. However, library officials decided to open “The X-Envelope” in 1994 and began the process of declassification.

The documents many based on FBI wiretaps show that Johnson had strong evidence about Nixon’s peace-talk sabotage, particularly the activities of campaign official Anna Chennault who passed messages to South Vietnamese Ambassador Bui Diem in Washington urging the South Vietnamese leaders to maintain their boycott of the Paris peace talks.

On Nov. 2, the FBI intercepted a conversation in which Chennault told Bui Diem to convey “a message from her boss (not further identified),” according to an FBI cable. Chennault said “her boss wanted her to give [the message] personally to the ambassador. She said the message was that the ambassador is to ‘hold on, we are going to win’ and that her boss also said, ‘hold on, he understands all of it.’ She repeated that this is the only message ‘he said please tell your boss to hold on.’”

That same day, Thieu recanted on his tentative agreement to meet with the Viet

Cong in Paris, pushing the incipient peace talks toward failure.

Several years ago, the National Archives released tape recordings of Johnson's phone calls further clarifying the depth of Johnson's knowledge and anger. On the night of Nov. 2, Johnson telephoned Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois and urged him to intercede with Nixon.

"The agent [Chennault] says she's just talked to the boss and that he said that you must hold out, just hold on until after the election," Johnson said. "We know what Thieu is saying to them out there. We're pretty well informed at both ends."

Johnson then issued a thinly veiled threat to go public. "I don't want to get this in the campaign," Johnson said, adding: "They oughtn't be doing this. This is treason."

Dirksen responded, "I know."

Johnson continued: "I think it would shock America if a principal candidate was playing with a source like this on a matter of this importance. I don't want to do that [go public]. They ought to know that we know what they're doing. I know who they're talking to. I know what they're saying."

Though Johnson personally spoke with Nixon about the Chennault issue, Nixon simply denied doing anything wrong and the peace stalemate continued through the final days of the campaign. On the day before the election, Johnson had one last chance to expose Nixon's "treason" when the White House was asked by the Christian Science Monitor to respond to a Saigon-dated article drafted by correspondent Beverly Deepe who had discovered the Republican obstruction from her South Vietnamese sources.

Johnson consulted with Rostow, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Defense Secretary Clark Clifford in a Nov. 4 conference call. Those three pillars of the Washington Establishment were unanimous in advising Johnson against going public, mostly out of fear that the scandalous information might reflect badly on the U.S. government.

"Some elements of the story are so shocking in their nature that I'm wondering whether it would be good for the country to disclose the story and then possibly have a certain individual [Nixon] elected," Clifford said. "It could cast his whole administration under such doubt that I think it would be inimical to our country's interests."

Johnson concurred with their judgment. An administration spokesman refused to confirm or deny the story, leading the Christian Science Monitor's editors to

spike Deepe's scoop.

Nixon's interference with the Paris peace talks remained secret as Americans went to the polls, many believing that Nixon did have a plan to end the war. Instead, once in the White House, Nixon escalated the war with heavier bombing of North Vietnam and an invasion of Cambodia. U.S. combat involvement would continue for four more years.

Yet, even as the historical record has become clearer in recent years, the old conventional wisdom about Watergate as a "third-rate burglary" that only proved politically devastating to Nixon because he engaged in an ill-advised cover-up remains the prevailing narrative. If you ask most mainstream U.S. journalists about the prime lesson of Watergate, they'll probably tell you that it shows that "the cover-up is always worse than the crime."

[For more on this topic, see Robert Parry's [America's Stolen Narrative](#), or go to Consortiumnews.com's "[LBJ's X-File on Nixon's 'Treason'](#)" or "[An Insider's View of Nixon's 'Treason'.](#)"]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

The Long Reach of Vietnam War Deceptions

America's war in Vietnam, which was authorized by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution a half century ago, had lasting consequences for the nation, including deeper public distrust of government and government's determination to restrict the people's right to know, as retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce explains.

By Todd E. Pierce

A half century ago, on Aug. 10, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution though he knew its justification was based entirely on deception. Indeed, it was a continuation of a pattern of deception begun with a series of clandestine acts of war against North Vietnam by U.S. forces known as "Oplan 34-A."

Oplan 34-A consisted of sabotage and psychological warfare attacks directed against and into North Vietnamese territory. This reality was only brought to light seven bloody years later with the release of the "Pentagon Papers" by courageous whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg.

These deceptions, culminating with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, triggered an unwinnable war fought entirely on false pretenses and further deceptions of the American people until defeat could no longer be postponed.

Yet, in addition to the massive loss of life and irreparable wounds to so many participants, along with the enormous economic costs, the other U.S. victim of the Vietnam War was the U.S. Constitution itself. Specifically, it was the Bill of Rights, which, taken together, provide the American people the "right to know."

The Bill of Rights was enacted so the U.S. citizenry could act as "centinels," as James Madison put it, over government officials, including intelligence and military officials, not the opposite. This was to protect the Republic against both perfidious and incompetent officials.

But officials during the Vietnam War worked to turn that principle upside-down. These officials would succeed in institutionalizing within the military their belief that the "people" themselves couldn't be trusted with information of what was being done in their name.

Military and intelligence leaders saw the need for themselves and their institutions to act as "sentinels" over the citizens so civilians could never again appreciably interfere with the military's contemplation, planning or conduct of a "war." The constitutional right to know became the "center of gravity," the main target, for the military's effort to suppress any future civilian "interference" with the military, a strategy that violated the very purpose of the Constitution.

Beyond infringing on the constitutional right of the American people to know what their government is doing, this reversal of who is supposed to control whom also came at the cost of national security. The "right to know" is not a mere privilege or luxury Americans have as a birthright; it is in the Constitution as part of the system of checks and balances the Framers created to provide for the "common defence," and has been the greatest strength the U.S. has had through its history, as other militaristic regimes that have come and gone show.

A Deep Cynicism

While the "Pentagon Papers" revealed nothing of military significance at the time of their release in 1971, they did reveal the "deep cynicism by the

military towards the public and a disregard for the loss of life and injury suffered by soldiers and civilians," as one historical assessment noted.

More threatening to President Richard Nixon, however, was H.R. "Bob" Haldeman's observation that the disclosures led the ordinary guy to believe that "You can't trust the government; you can't believe what they say; and you can't rely on their judgment. And the implicit infallibility of presidents, which has been an accepted thing in America, is badly hurt by this, because it shows that people do things the president wants to do even though it's wrong, and the president can be wrong."

Military leaders such as General William Westmoreland had a similar view of any information that could prove embarrassing to the military when published by the press corps.

So Nixon, in his role as Commander in Chief presiding over a war that practically everyone conceded as lost, and the military leaders who had run the war with their self-defeating "strategies," counter-attacked against the press whom they blamed for turning Americans against the war. They charged the media with a "stab in the back" of the military. This became a common belief in the military and among pro-war civilians to the ultimate detriment of the United States. In fact, Nixon had called the press "our worst enemy" in the war.

Getting It Right

There were wiser officials who saw the war as unwinnable from the beginning. Undersecretary of State George Ball advised against entering what he recognized as a Vietnamese civil war.

The military had officers who knew the war was unwinnable as well, at least by 1967 when "only" 12,269 Americans had been listed as killed. General Fred Weyand, though only identified much later, told reporters "Westie just doesn't get it. The war is unwinnable. We've reached a stalemate and we should find a dignified way out."

This recognition led to a very accurate New York Times article of Aug. 7, 1967, unlike the intelligence reports that Westmoreland's G-2 (Intelligence) staff produced. Two unidentified generals were quoted, one later revealed as Weyand, who stated that he had destroyed a single North Vietnamese division three times:

"I've chased main-force units all over the country and the impact was zilch. It meant nothing to the people. Unless a more positive and more stirring theme than simple anti-communism can be found, the war appears likely to go on until someone gets tired and quits, which could take generations."

The other general's quote was "Every time Westie makes a speech about how good the South Vietnam Army is, I want to ask him why he keeps calling for more Americans. His need for reinforcements is a measure of our failure with the Vietnamese."

The article's author wrote, referring to the South Vietnamese, that "The best talent in the current generation has long since been lost: Thousands of men who might be leading South Vietnamese troops in combat are serving with the North Vietnamese or the Vietcong, heirs to the country's nationalist revolution against the French." Or they were languishing in exile following South Vietnamese purges.

But it being truthful, the article enraged President Johnson and Generals Westmoreland and Earle Wheeler, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Had Johnson shaped his decision-making to the astute analysis of the "press" in this case, the losses of the Vietnam War would have been much lower. Instead, he granted Westmoreland's wish for a "surge," and sent an additional 205,000 soldiers to Vietnam.

Westmoreland's Bigotry

Westmoreland expressed what he understood of the Vietnamese people when he said, "The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. ... We value life and human dignity. They don't care about life and human dignity." This viewpoint was passed on to too many subordinates we now know, as seen in the far more common occurrence of American war crimes than previously known, which further alienated Vietnamese from the U.S.

Taking such bigotry as a license to treat Vietnamese villagers in the harshest manner, Westmoreland's policy included destroying their rice paddies and herding the people into "relocation camps."

"Herding" villagers and their livestock was literally true as the Army described "Operation Rawhide" in a press release after Westmoreland decreed there would be no more farming, or farmers, in the Central Highlands. In this case, the old adage – "it was worse than a crime, it was a blunder" understated the case.

Nixon's attacks on the press were easily dismissed as routine for him and he eventually shuffled off in disgrace anyway. But most insidiously, American military leaders who couldn't agree amongst themselves on how to fight the war could agree on who was responsible for losing it: the press.

Their accusation against the press was that it reported negative news, even though true, causing Americans to lose their "will" to fight, and an antiwar movement grew out of that. These military leaders believed or convinced

themselves that they would have won the war if not for the media's "negativity."

This "stab in the back" myth became conventional wisdom within much of the military down to the present day, as shown in numerous military journal articles, due to these officers' efforts to revise history at the expense of their country.

This hostility toward the press is best shown in some of the writings of retired Lt. Col. Ralph Peters, who has even suggested that journalists may have to be targeted; killed. Short of that though has come the military's strict grip on the message through the information control policies of today.

These policies are to classify and over-classify practically all information related to the military, total surveillance over the population, both foreign and domestic, and the harshest of consequences for whistle blowers, even though or maybe because they reveal illegality by military and intelligence officials.

Stab in the Back Origin

German General Erich Ludendorff created the template for how guilt was to be assigned by a military after they've lost a war. In his case, it was World War I. He created the "stab in the back" myth that laid blame for Germany losing the war on civilians who were alleged to be defeatist and who undercut morale or were insufficiently loyal.

Germany had become ever more militarized as World War I went on, just as the other belligerents had, so there was no longer a press free of military censorship to cast the blame on. But Ludendorff's accusations of disloyalty against German civilians paved the way for the eventual Nazi takeover and the draconian system of censorship, surveillance and military commissions over civilians that the Nazis put into place.

Political dissent was criminalized as a violation of German's absolute duty of loyalty to the nation under the law of war during wartime, which the Nazis worked to make permanent. (Today, some American legal commentators glibly echo this by suggesting that censorship may be necessary to suppress "antigovernment speech" which "may demoralize soldiers and civilians," while arguing that we're now in a "long war" of indefinite duration against a tactic known as "terrorism.")

In World War II Germany, trying cases of "disloyalty" primarily fell to the infamous "People's Court;" in actuality a military commission or a "war court." Anyone "disloyal" in any manner or degree was said to degrade the war-fighting "will" of the German people. Representative examples of these offenses include suggesting the war was the cause of food shortages or making an innocuous joke

about a German leader.

Vietnam War Lost

In the style of Ludendorf, senior American military officers in charge of the conduct of the Vietnam War similarly accused civilians of stabbing the military in the back after South Vietnam fell to the North. Their accusation against elected officials was that they didn't give the military everything the military asked for to fight the war, as if the resources of the U.S. were inexhaustible or as if that was a strategy in itself.

General H.R. McMaster added a slight twist by including the Joint Chiefs of Staff for not demanding even more troops and inflicting even greater harm by increasing costs to the civilian economy. But the most insidious charge was against the press of the day, the media. Leading officers accused the media of having caused the American people to lose their "will" to fight the war.

It wasn't that these officers didn't give credit to Americans for drawing conclusions from seeing the dead and wounded returned, it was that civilians had no right to their own conclusions if they were in conflict with military leadership. The solution seen by these military leaders was to deny information to the citizenry regarding military operations except for "feel good" news.

The officers accusing the press were all responsible for the conduct of the war, including General Westmoreland. In his 1976 book, *A Soldier Reports*, Westmoreland revealed that President Johnson expressed regrets he had not imposed censorship and the General obviously shared that regret.

But Westmoreland was coy enough to damn the press with faint praise. While disclaiming any vendetta against the press, in spite of their "errors, misinterpretations, judgments, and falsehoods," Westmoreland quoted an Australian journalist who had said "there are those who say it was the first war in history lost in the columns of the New York Times."

Westmoreland lamented elsewhere: "Vietnam was the first war ever fought without any censorship. Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind."

But Westmoreland is who was confused. He wrote: "Reflecting the view of the war held by many in the United States and often contributing to it, the general tone of press and television comment was critical, particularly following the Tet offensive of 1968."

Not be critical was to be confused. Westmoreland could not fathom that the American people and the press, along with soldiers in his own Army, could see his war strategy was completely irrational and failing, even while he was

deliberately covering that fact up with a disinformation campaign.

Accept What You're Told

Westmoreland, like Nixon, believed the citizens' duty was to accept anything they were told by the government, especially by the military. This would explain why neither could understand that the role of the press under the U.S. Constitution is to act as the people's watchdog; to protect the people's interests. This is especially so in wartime as a check on incompetent officers, as Westmoreland proved to be.

Though Westmoreland had sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution, he wrote: "It may well be that between press and official there is an inherent, built-in inherent conflict of interest. There is something to be said for both sides, but when the nation is at war and men's lives are at stake, there should be no ambiguity. . . . If the nation is to wage war – declared or undeclared – a policy should be set to protect the interests of both press and government and avoid the ambiguity that characterized relationships in South Vietnam."

Here, Westmoreland laid the ideological cornerstone of strict military information and media control which the U.S. has now. This allows the appearance of a free press, but one thoroughly conditioned to defer to the government, the military or the intelligence services.

An example of this is the suppression for a year by the New York Times of an article written by James Risen about President George W. Bush's use of warrantless wiretaps against Americans in his "war on terror." Unlike so many "journalists" who merely celebrate the military and the intelligence agencies, Risen acted as a journalist should.

That the military and the intelligence agencies need the oversight meant to be provided by a free, critical press, the so-called Fourth Estate, is made convincingly, though perhaps unintentionally, by retired Army Lt. Col. Lewis Sorley in his book: *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*. Paradoxically, or ironically, Sorley was one of the officers who blamed the press for determining the course of the war but his book on Westmoreland refutes that argument.

Vainglorious Westie

Westmoreland was a vainglorious officer of shallow intellect in the George Armstrong Custer mold. He had advanced through lower-level commands, not without some controversy regarding his judgment. His major accomplishment in the decade before going to Vietnam seemed to be as Superintendent of West Point. His "accomplishments" there were to get a new football stadium funded, expand the

size of the Corps of Cadets so the football team would have more cadets to draw upon, and having a pamphlet sent to influential people, "West Point Points the Way in Post Efficiency."

But upon being appointed Commander of U. S. Forces in Vietnam, Westmoreland immediately assumed he was now an expert on Vietnam.

Brimming with his customary conceit, fresh off his successful campaign for the new football stadium, Westmoreland, according to Sorley, wrote to his father shortly after arrival in Vietnam in April 1964, "this war has been very badly reported to the American people through the press, and I might say the New York Times is perhaps the best example of what I mean."

He claimed that the New York Times had not sent their best reporters to the war zone and that many were "young, immature, impetuous men who have been unprepared to report the situation objectively." He viewed other leading journalists in Vietnam with similar disdain.

But Associated Press reporter Peter Arnett pointed out: "When Westy took command in 1964, I was thirty years of age. I had been in Southeast Asia for eight years, and had been all over Vietnam. I was married to a Vietnamese woman. My father-in-law was a colonel in the Vietnamese army. I knew John Paul Vann and most of the American advisors. What did he [Westmoreland] mean that we were too young and didn't know anything? Westy was wrong."

Information Warfare

According to Sorley, when Westmoreland was decrying the "errors, misinterpretations, judgments, and falsehoods" of the press, all of which pertained to himself, he was actively creating falsehoods of success for the press to report. Sorley describes Westmoreland's active role in LBJ's "Progress Offensive," an active disinformation campaign, or Information Operation as it would be called today, designed to mislead the American people and their elected representatives.

Its objective was consistent with Joint Chief of Staff Chairman General Earle Wheeler's guidance to portray the war in the most favorable light, in disregard of the facts.

The "Progress Offensive" was "a systematic effort to convince the American people that the war in Vietnam was being won," according to Sorley, especially in 1967. Westmoreland was a willing partner in that. But Westmoreland's deceit began even before he was brought on board the "Progress Offensive."

Westmoreland had submitted statistics to Wheeler in early 1967 showing that the

enemy was increasing the "tactical initiative." Sorley wrote that Wheeler was distraught and wailed: "If these figures should reach the public domain they would, literally, blow the lid off Washington."

So Wheeler first instructed Westmoreland not to release the figures to the news media. As more information became available showing the situation worsening, with Westmoreland's maltreatment of Vietnamese villagers probably being a cause, Wheeler sent a general officer out to help Westmoreland "fix" the problem.

Later, Westmoreland sent a memorandum to Wheeler stating: "Lieutenant General Brown's team and members of my staff have developed terms of reference in the form of new definitions, criteria, formats and procedures relating to the reporting of enemy activity which can be used to assess effectively significant trends in the organized enemy combat initiative."

In fact, this amounted to manipulation of intelligence by Westmoreland which later became the "order of battle" controversy and set the stage for Americans to be shocked by the Tet Offensive in January-February 1968. How many additional American lives would be lost and ruined due to this chicanery did not seem to be relevant to the numbers fixers.

A Conspiracy to Deceive

That this numbers manipulation was a conspiracy to deceive the public and the policymakers is shown by a message sent by General Bruce Palmer on Aug. 19, 1967, stating that Westmoreland was concerned that "the U.S. press is painting a pessimistic, stalemated situation in RVN." Palmer continued: "To counteract this distorted impression of the true situation, he [Westmoreland] is launching a local campaign to portray and articulate the very real progress underway in the Vietnamese War."

As Sorley put it, far from being the reluctant participant Westmoreland claimed to be, he "was opening his own branch office of the Progress Offensive."

Westmoreland reported his plans to Wheeler and others in August 1967, at the time of the New York Times article cited above, that "of course we must make haste carefully in order to avoid charges that the military establishment is conducting an organized propaganda campaign, either overt or covert."

As he saw it in Vietnam, "while we work on the nerve endings here we hope that careful attention will be paid to the roots there – the confused or unknowledgeable pundits who serve as sources for each other." And as shown, a couple of his own generals including General Weyand also served as sources for those "confused or unknowledgeable pundits."

Sorley notes that General Wheeler could have told President Johnson the truth and “provided him with the information he needed to make informed decisions about the future course of the war. But he did not.”

This subversion of the constitutional principle that the military is subordinate to civilian officials by a deliberate deception could be said to be tantamount to treason, and should have been cause for Court Martial of Wheeler, Westmoreland and their co-conspirators, without excusing Johnson for his misconduct.

Hammering Home the Point

Following Westmoreland’s lead after the war, other senior military leaders came out with their own books disclaiming any responsibility for the Vietnam disaster. Among them were Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific; Lt.Gen. Phillip Davidson, MACV J-2, (Westmoreland’s chief intelligence officer); General Bruce Palmer, Jr.; and Westmoreland’s one-time aide, Lt. Gen., Dave R. Palmer. All in essence accused the press of stabbing the nation and the military in the back, in the Ludendorf model.

In *Summons of the Trumpet*, written in 1978, Lt. Gen. Dave R. Palmer wrote: “Dissent and dissenters inside America itself did much to discredit the war by spreading doubt and sowing despair.”

Palmer allowed that the dissenters covered a wide spectrum of society, from housewives to retired generals, adding that they had two things in common, they were highly visible and their ranks grew as the war years stretched on.

This caused “confusion” in Dave Palmer’s view. He wrote that “debate and dissent, based on emotion as well as logic, grew apace as the war progressed, serving mightily as major contributors to confusion.” But to Palmer, the news media bore responsibility “for having muddied issues in the war,” concluding that “the American press failed to clarify the war in Vietnam and, not unfairly, can be accused of adding to the public bewilderment.”

But who was truly confused? Later in his book, Palmer quotes part of Westmoreland’s summary of 1967, which reached Washington four days before the Tet Offensive began. As Palmer says, “Like nearly every official, the general was optimistic. He confidently reported:

“‘In many areas the enemy has been driven away from the population centers; in others he has been compelled to disperse and evade contact, thus nullifying much of his potential. The year ended with the enemy resorting to desperation tactics in attempting to achieve military/psychological victory; and he has experienced only failures in these attempts.’”

But Palmer stated, "the government had not deliberately misled the American people." He explains that was why they were so stunned, because the "President and his entourage truly believed their own assurances." But that wasn't true.

Selling the Public

As a close associate of Westmoreland's, Palmer would have known of Westmoreland's "Progress Offensive" which was designed to mislead the American people into believing that "progress" in the war was being made. Palmer's disingenuous accusation that the press was responsible for the confusion of the American people when it was his own commander working to sow confusion and mislead the people he was supposed to be working for, the American public, can only be seen as shameless blame shifting from his military cronies onto the press.

Continuing this theme was the other commander over the Vietnam War, Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, CINCPAC. As CINCPAC, Sharp was in charge of the air war by the Navy and the Air Force over North Vietnam during Westmoreland's tenure.

Sharp wrote *Strategy for Defeat*, wherein he explained how he and General Westmoreland would have won the war but for those "civilian politico decision makers" who had "no business ignoring or overriding the counsel of experienced military professionals" in the conduct of the war.

But in the end, Admiral Sharp accused the American press of losing the war by eroding our "will" because "we were subjected to a skillfully waged subversive propaganda campaign, aided and abetted by the media's bombardment of sensationalism, rumors and half-truths about the Vietnam affair – a campaign that destroyed our national unity?"

Another Westmoreland crony, General Bruce Palmer, Jr., deputy commander in Vietnam, bewailed in his 1984 book that "the United States seems to share a common weakness of Western democracies, an inability to inculcate in people the kind of determination and almost religious zeal which communist countries have achieved."

But it wasn't for lack of trying to artificially "inculcate" this zeal. Palmer claims that many of the officers in Vietnam resented "having our field commander being put on the spot" by being called back to the U.S. and being used for political purposes by LBJ, such as to testify to Congress on how well the war was going. But Palmer acknowledged that Westmoreland enjoyed those occasions and would return to Saigon still "up on cloud nine."

But General Palmer's arguments were logically conflicted. With his book, *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam*, one wonders if the author isn't

schizophrenic. He gives all the evidence for why it was self-evident that Vietnam was an unwinnable war being run by amateurs, even listing the multitudinous errors committed in Vietnam by U.S. military leaders, including their own disputes on strategy.

Palmer also calls congressional members hypocrites for making antiwar speeches while voting money for the war, as if there were not harsh political consequences for anyone not "supporting the troops." He also faulted teachers and professors for opposing the war. Yet, at the time he was writing his book, General Palmer claimed that, in hindsight, the war might not have been winnable all along. Still, he criticized those who questioned it.

Back in Time

None of the above officers could match Lt. Gen. Phillip B. Davidson, however, in hostility toward the press and the Constitution, which he was sworn to protect. Davidson's books on Vietnam transports one back to the Second German Reich of Kaiser Wilhelm, when Prussian militarism was at its peak and war was celebrated for its own sake.

Davidson argued that Congress should have declared war on the Vietnamese so the U.S. government could exercise censorship and prosecute dissenters for treason. This, in fact, is a suggestion made today by some authoritarian law school commentators, with the so-called "Long War" that we're in.

But it was Col. Harry Summers, Jr., relying on works by arch-neoconservative and militarist Norman Podhoretz, who took deception to an even higher level than Westmoreland while making the "stab in the back" accusation against the media.

In doing so, Summers also deceived his intellectually lazy fellow military officers by substituting a parody of *On War* by Carl von Clausewitz, with his own *On Strategy*, which then became very influential in the U.S. military according to David Petraeus and remains on many military reading lists today.

In fact, Summers's *On Strategy* was a revisionist falsification of Clausewitz's principles. A slight knowledge of Clausewitz and *On War* is necessary to understand this.

Understanding Clausewitz

Clausewitz fought a war of resistance against Bonaparte imperialism. With an anti-imperial viewpoint and respect for the sovereignty of other nations, Clausewitz saw the defensive as the stronger form of war at the strategic level, not the offensive.

He wrote: "we must say that *the defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive*. This is the point we have been trying to make, for although it is implicit in the nature of the matter and experience has confirmed it again and again. It is at odds with prevalent opinion, which proves how ideas can be confused by superficial writers."

Those superficial writers today would include Dick Cheney who has always favored the offensive form of war called "forward leaning" that he wants other Americans to fight.

Clausewitz understood that when nations did go to war, "the reason always lies in some political situation, and the occasion is always due to some political object. War therefore, is an act of policy."

Since war is driven by its political object, "the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration," but once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow. Westmoreland and other pro-Vietnam War advocates failed to understand this.

Clausewitz also wrote, "Be that as it may, we must always consider that with the conclusion of peace the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end." For Clausewitz, even between adversarial states, the objective of war policy is to restore peace, not to maintain a permanent state of war against a concept such as "terrorism" or with a permanent occupation of territory seized in war, such as the West Bank and Gaza.

An Informed Electorate

Policy for any nation will be what its sovereign decides. In a democratic republic, the sovereign is supposed to be its citizens and, therefore, it is for them to consider how best to pursue national policy. That requires the electorate to be informed, necessitating the free flow of information; a fundamental requirement of democratic governance and its greatest strength.

Without the "right to know" and an involved citizenry, including an active and critical press, there is no gauge for when "the expenditure of effort, exceeds the value of the political object" to determine when "the object must be renounced and peace must follow."

Or if the "object" should never have been pursued in the first place. Military leaders, with only a few exceptions, only demand more "surges." For the political calculation on war or peace to be made with any accuracy, there also must be tolerance for dissenting opinions.

Clausewitz's theory of war was fully consistent with the attitudes of many American Founders on the need to avoid "entangling alliances" that could drag the young nation into ill-considered wars. In the early years of the Republic, American leaders were particularly on guard against pressures that sought to involve them in conflicts between France and England.

Contrast this with *On Strategy*, the "Bible" for the "stab in the back" crowd. What its author, Col. Harry Summers, Jr., did was to flip Clausewitz's strategic theory upside down, ignoring Clausewitz's recognition that the defensive was the stronger form of war than the offensive.

Unfortunately, Summers's book, by its association with Clausewitz, acquired a veneer of strategic legitimacy for which the United States is still paying today. Primarily, that cost is paid by the loss of the constitutional "right to know" as most post-Vietnam War administrations have accepted the fallacious claim that the press was responsible for "losing" Vietnam and thus have further curtailed the public's access to "national security" information.

Why Does This Matter?

This process of over-classification and excessive secrecy has reached an apex with the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama despite the latter's promises of greater "transparency." Instead, the antagonism toward a free press and an informed public that came out of the Vietnam War have continued to guide information policy, including aggressive prosecutions aimed at whistleblowers, such as Pvt. Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, and legal intimidation of journalists, such as James Risen and Glenn Greenwald.

Fanatics such as Fox News commentator retired Lt. Col. Ralph Peters have even called for "targeting" members of the media.

And, despite the Obama administration's zeal in protecting "national security" secrets, there is now an echo of the "stab in the back" complaint against President Obama for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, even though it was President Bush who accepted the timetable demanded by the Iraqi government.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney and daughter Liz virtually accused Obama of treason against the United States when they claimed "he abandoned Iraq and we are watching American defeat snatched from the jaws of victory."

The inestimable Lt. Col. Ralph Peters went even further when he charged Obama with "the creation of the first jihadi state in modern history stretching from central Syria to central Iraq and now approaching Baghdad all because President Obama saw everything through a political lens."

But a more accurate “stab in the back” accusation against President Obama would be that he has continued the post-Vietnam approach of hiding as much “national security” information as possible from the American people and trying to use the press more as a conduit for propaganda than for dissemination of truth.

For decades now, the deadliest “stab in the back” to the American Republic has been the one inflicted on the Bill of Rights, with President Obama seeming to give it a final twist.

Todd E. Pierce retired as a Major in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps in November 2012. His most recent assignment was defense counsel in the Office of Chief Defense Counsel, Office of Military Commissions.

How LBJ Was Deceived on Gulf of Tonkin

As war hawks today push President Obama into more and more confrontations, there is an echo from a half century ago when Vietnam War hawks manipulated President Johnson into a bombing campaign in retaliation for the phony Gulf of Tonkin incident, as Gareth Porter recalls.

By Gareth Porter

For most of the last five decades, it has been assumed that the Tonkin Gulf incident was a deception by Lyndon Johnson to justify war in Vietnam. But the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam on Aug. 4, 1964, in retaliation for an alleged naval attack that never happened – and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution that followed was not a move by LBJ to get the American people to support a U.S. war in Vietnam.

The real deception on that day was that Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’s misled LBJ by withholding from him the information that the U.S. commander in the Gulf – who had initially reported an attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats on U.S. warships – had later expressed serious doubts about the initial report and was calling for a full investigation by daylight. That withholding of information from LBJ represented a brazen move to usurp the President’s constitutional power of decision on the use of military force.

McNamara’s deception is documented in the declassified files on the Tonkin Gulf episode in the Lyndon Johnson library, which this writer used to piece together the untold story of the Tonkin Gulf episode in a 2005 book on the U.S. entry into war in Vietnam. It is a key element of a wider story of how the national security state, including both military and civilian officials, tried repeatedly

to pressure LBJ to commit the United States to a wider war in Vietnam.

Johnson had refused to retaliate two days earlier for a North Vietnamese attack on U.S. naval vessels carrying out electronic surveillance operations. But he accepted McNamara's recommendation for retaliatory strikes on Aug. 4 based on reports of a second attack. But after that decision, the U.S. task force commander in the Gulf, Capt. John Herrick, began to send messages expressing doubt about the initial reports and suggested a "complete evaluation" before any action was taken in response.

McNamara had read Herrick's message by mid-afternoon, and when he called the Pacific Commander, Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp Jr., he learned that Herrick had expressed further doubt about the incident based on conversations with the crew of the Maddox. Sharp specifically recommended that McNamara "hold this execute" of the U.S. airstrikes planned for the evening while he sought to confirm that the attack had taken place.

But McNamara told Sharp he preferred to "continue the execute order in effect" while he waited for "a definite fix" from Sharp about what had actually happened.

McNamara then proceeded to issue the strike execute order without consulting with LBJ about what he had learned from Sharp, thus depriving him of the choice of cancelling the retaliatory strike before an investigation could reveal the truth.

At the White House meeting that night, McNamara again asserted flatly that U.S. ships had been attacked in the Gulf. When questioned about the evidence, McNamara said, "Only highly classified information nails down the incident." But the NSA intercept of a North Vietnamese message that McNamara cited as confirmation could not possibly have been related to the Aug. 4 incident, as intelligence analysts quickly determined based from the time-date group of the message.

LBJ began to suspect that McNamara had kept vital information from him, and immediately ordered national security adviser McGeorge Bundy to find out whether the alleged attack had actually taken place and required McNamara's office to submit a complete chronology of McNamara's contacts with the military on Aug. 4 for the White House indicating what had transpired in each of them.

But that chronology shows that McNamara continued to hide the substance of the conversation with Admiral Sharp from LBJ. It omitted Sharp's revelation that Capt. Herrick considered the "whole situation" to be "in doubt" and was calling for a "daylight recce [reconnaissance]" before any decision to retaliate, as

well as Sharp's agreement with Herrick's recommendation. It also falsely portrayed McNamara as having agreed with Sharp that the execute order should be delayed until confirming evidence was found.

Contrary to the assumption that LBJ used the Tonkin Gulf incident to move U.S. policy firmly onto a track for military intervention, it actually widened the differences between Johnson and his national security advisers over Vietnam policy. Within days after the episode Johnson had learned enough to be convinced that the alleged attack had not occurred and he responded by halting both the CIA-managed commando raids on the North Vietnamese coast U.S. and the U.S. naval patrols near the coast.

In fact, McNamara's deception on Aug. 4 was just one of 12 distinct episodes in which top U.S. national security officials attempted to press a reluctant LBJ to begin a bombing campaign against North Vietnam.

In September 1964, McNamara and other top officials tried to get LBJ to approve a deliberately provocative policy of naval patrols running much closer to the North Vietnamese coast and at the same time as the commando raids. They hoped for another incident that would justify a bombing program. But Johnson insisted that the naval patrols stay at least 20 miles away from the coast and stopped the commando operations.

Six weeks after the Tonkin Gulf bombing, on Sept. 18, 1964, McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk claimed yet another North Vietnamese attack on a U.S. destroyer in Gulf and tried to get LBJ to approve another retaliatory strike. But a skeptical LBJ told McNamara, "You just came in a few weeks ago and said they're launching an attack on us they're firing at us, and we got through with the firing and concluded maybe they hadn't fired at all."

After LBJ was elected in November 1964, he continued to resist a unanimous formal policy recommendation of his advisers that he should begin the systematic bombing of North Vietnam. He stubbornly argued for three more months that there was no point in bombing the North as long as the South was divided and unstable.

Johnson also refused to oppose the demoralized South Vietnamese government negotiating a neutralist agreement with the Communists, much to his advisers' chagrin. McGeorge Bundy later recalled in an oral history interview that he concluded that Johnson was "coming to a decision to lose" in South Vietnam.

LBJ only capitulated to the pressure from his advisers after McNamara and Bundy wrote a joint letter to him in late January 1965 making it clear that responsibility for U.S. "humiliation" in South Vietnam would rest squarely on his shoulders if he continued his policy of "passivity." Fearing, with good

reason, that his own top national security advisers would turn on him and blame him for the loss of South Vietnam, LBJ eventually began the bombing of North Vietnam.

He was then sucked into the maelstrom of the Vietnam War, which he defended publicly and privately, leading to the logical but mistaken conclusion that he had been the main force behind the push for war all along.

The deeper lesson of the Tonkin Gulf episode is how a group of senior national security officials can seek determinedly through hardball and even illicit tactics to advance a war agenda, even knowing that the President of the United States is resisting it.

Gareth Porter, an investigative historian and journalist specialising in U.S. national security policy, received the UK-based Gellhorn Prize for journalism for 2011 for articles on the U.S. war in Afghanistan. His new book *Manufactured Crisis: the Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, was published Feb. 14.

An Insider's View of Nixon's 'Treason'

Special Report: A recently released oral history by one of President Nixon's secretive operatives sheds new light on perhaps Nixon's darkest crime, the sabotaging of Vietnam peace talks so he could win the 1968 election, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Tom Charles Huston, the national security aide assigned by President Richard Nixon to investigate what President Lyndon Johnson knew about why the Vietnam peace talks failed in 1968, concluded that Nixon was personally behind a secret Republican scheme to sabotage those negotiations whose collapse cleared the way to his narrow victory and to four more years of war.

"Over the years as I've studied it, I've concluded that there was no doubt that Nixon would have been directly involved, that it's not something that anybody would've undertaken on their own," Huston said in an oral history done for the Nixon presidential library in 2008 and recently released in partially redacted form.

Huston, who is best known for the 1970 Huston Plan to expand spying on the anti-Vietnam War movement, said he was assigned the peace-talk investigation after

Nixon took office because Nixon was told by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that President Johnson had learned of Nixon's sabotage through national security wiretaps.

Those wiretaps had revealed that Nixon's campaign was promising South Vietnamese President Nguyen van Thieu a better deal if he boycotted the Paris peace talks, which Thieu did in the days before the U.S. presidential election in 1968.

"I think clearly there was no doubt that the Nixon campaign was aggressively trying to keep President Thieu from agreeing," Huston said in his oral history [To see the transcripts, click [here](#) and [here](#).]

Johnson's failure to achieve a breakthrough stalled a late surge by Vice President Hubert Humphrey and enabled Nixon to prevail in one of the closest elections in U.S. history. Nixon then expanded the war with heavier strategic bombing over Indochina and with an invasion of Cambodia before winding down U.S. troop levels by 1973.

In those Nixon years, a million more Vietnamese were estimated to have died along with an additional 20,763 U.S. dead and 111,230 wounded. The war also bitterly divided the United States, often turning parents against their own children.

Hoover's Double Game

According to Huston, Hoover briefed Nixon on his potential vulnerability regarding Johnson's wiretap evidence even before Nixon took office. "That goes back to the meeting that Nixon had with Hoover at the Pierre Hotel in New York after the election, at which Nixon made it clear to Hoover that he was going to reappoint him, which is what Hoover wanted.

"But, you know, Hoover was a piece of work. I mean, at the same time that pursuant to instructions from Lyndon Johnson he's got his agents scurrying all over the damn Southwest, you know, trying to dig up dirt on the vice president-elect [Spiro Agnew for his purported role in the peace-talk sabotage], [Hoover]'s sitting with the President-elect and telling him that Johnson had bugged his airplane during the '68 campaign," a specific claim that was apparently false but something that Nixon appears to have believed.

Faced with uncertainty about exactly what evidence Johnson had, Nixon ordered up a review of what was in the files, including whatever obstacles that the peace talks had encountered, an area that Huston felt required examining the issue of Republican obstruction, including contacts between Nixon campaign operative Anna Chennault and senior South Vietnamese officials.

"I wasn't really asked specifically to address Chennault, but you couldn't really look at [Johnson's] bombing halt and the politics of the bombing halt without – at least in my judgment, without looking at what Johnson was looking at," Huston said. "What Johnson was looking at was this perception that the Nixon campaign was doing whatever it could to sabotage his efforts to achieve a bombing halt."

Huston found that nearly all the national security files at the White House had been packed up and shipped to the Johnson presidential library in Austin, Texas, so Huston began piecing together the material from records recovered from the FBI and other federal agencies. According to the National Archives, Nixon, as the sitting president, would have had relatively easy access to the material shipped to Austin if he had wanted it.

The X-Envelope

But Johnson had taken no chances that Nixon's team might recover the file containing the evidence on what Johnson called Nixon's "treason." As Johnson was leaving the White House in January 1969, he ordered his national security aide Walt Rostow to take that file and keep it in his personal possession. Rostow labeled the file "The X-Envelope," although it has since become known to Johnson archivists as the "X-File."

Describing his investigation, Huston said he eventually "got so frustrated because I knew I wasn't getting all of the information that would allow me to really understand what had happened in Paris. And so I decided to go out and start bird-dogging on my own," reaching out to other federal agencies.

Huston said "there is no question" that the Nixon campaign approached senior South Vietnamese officials with promises of a better deal if they stayed away from the Paris peace talks.

"Clearly, [campaign manager John] Mitchell was directly involved. Mitchell was meeting with her [Chennault], and, you know, the question, was the candidate himself directly involved, and, you know, my conclusion is that there is no evidence that I found, nor that anyone else has found that I can determine, that I regard as credible, that would confirm the fact that Nixon was directly involved.

"I think my understanding of the way in which – having been in the '68 campaign, and my understanding of the way that campaign was run, it's inconceivable to me that John Mitchell would be running around, you know, passing messages to the South Vietnamese government, et cetera, on his own initiative."

Though Huston reported to Nixon that the Johnson people apparently lacked a

“smoking gun” that personally implicated him in the scheme, the whereabouts of the missing evidence and exactly what it showed remained a pressing concern to Nixon and his inner circle, especially in June 1971 when major American newspapers began publishing the leaked Pentagon Papers. That report revealed the deceptions that had pervaded the Vietnam conflict from its post-World War II origins through 1967, covering mostly Democratic lies.

A Dangerous Sequel

But Nixon knew what few others did, that there was the potential for a devastating sequel, the story of how the Nixon campaign had torpedoed peace talks that could have ended the war. Given the intensity of anti-war sentiment in 1971, such a revelation could have had explosive and unforeseeable consequences, conceivably even impeachment and certainly threatening Nixon’s reelection in 1972.

Huston had come to believe that a detailed report on the failed Paris peace talks, possibly containing the evidence of the Republican sabotage, had ended up at the Brookings Institution, then regarded as a liberal think tank housing many of Nixon’s top critics.

“I send [White House chief of staff H.R. “Bob”] Haldeman a memo and I said, basically, ‘You’re not going to believe this.’ Here I’ve spent all these months, I’ve been chasing all over the God-dang’d government try to get everybody to give me bits and pieces and trying to do this job that you told me to do, and the God-dang’d Brookings Institution is sitting over here with a God-dang’d multi-volume report that I don’t have. And if Brookings can get the damn thing, I don’t see any reason why I can’t get it.”

According to Brookings officials and U.S. government archivists, Huston appears to have been wrong in his conclusions about the existence of such a “multi-volume report” hidden at Brookings, but his memo would have historical repercussions because it became the focus of a frantic Oval Office meeting on June 17, 1971, as Nixon and his top aides were assessing their own exposure as the Pentagon Papers filled the front pages of the New York Times.

Blow the Safe

Nixon summoned Haldeman and national security advisor Henry Kissinger into the Oval Office and as Nixon’s own recording devices whirred softly pleaded with them again to locate the missing file. “Do we have it?” Nixon asked Haldeman. “I’ve asked for it. You said you didn’t have it.”

Haldeman: “We can’t find it.”

Kissinger: "We have nothing here, Mr. President."

Nixon: "Well, damnit, I asked for that because I need it."

Kissinger: "But Bob and I have been trying to put the damn thing together."

Haldeman: "We have a basic history in constructing our own, but there is a file on it."

Nixon: "Where?"

Haldeman: "Huston swears to God that there's a file on it and it's at Brookings."

Nixon: "Bob? Bob? Now do you remember Huston's plan [for White House-sponsored break-ins as part of domestic counter-intelligence operations]? Implement it."

Kissinger: "Now Brookings has no right to have classified documents."

Nixon: "I want it implemented. Goddamnit, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it."

Haldeman: "They may very well have cleaned them by now, but this thing, you need to "

Kissinger: "I wouldn't be surprised if Brookings had the files."

Haldeman: "My point is Johnson knows that those files are around. He doesn't know for sure that we don't have them around."

But Johnson did know that the key file documenting Nixon's peace-talk sabotage was safely out of Nixon's reach, entrusted to his former national security advisor Walt Rostow.

Forming the Burglars

On June 30, 1971, Nixon again berated Haldeman about the need to break into Brookings and "take it [the file] out." Nixon even suggested using former CIA officer E. Howard Hunt to conduct the Brookings break-in.

"You talk to Hunt," Nixon told Haldeman. "I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You're to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in. Just go in and take it. Go in around 8:00 or 9:00 o'clock."

Haldeman: "Make an inspection of the safe."

Nixon: "That's right. You go in to inspect the safe. I mean, *clean it up.*"

For reasons that remain unclear, it appears that the Brookings break-in never took place although Brookings officials say an attempted break-in was made but Nixon's desperation to locate Johnson's peace-talk evidence was an important link in the chain of events that led to the creation of Nixon's burglary unit under Hunt's supervision. Hunt later oversaw the two Watergate break-ins in May and June of 1972.

While it's possible that Nixon was still searching for the evidence about his Vietnam-peace sabotage when the Watergate break-ins occurred nearly a year later, it's generally believed that the burglary was more broadly focused, seeking any information that might have an impact on Nixon's re-election, either defensively or offensively.

As it turned out, Nixon's burglars were nabbed inside the Watergate complex during their second break-in at the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972, exactly one year after Nixon's tirade to Haldeman and Kissinger about the need to blow the safe at the Brookings Institution in pursuit of the missing Vietnam peace-talk file.

Ironically, too, Johnson and Rostow had no intention of exposing Nixon's dirty secret regarding LBJ's Vietnam peace talks, presumably for the same reasons that they kept their mouths shut back in 1968, out of a benighted belief that revealing Nixon's actions might somehow not be "good for the country." [For details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

The Scandal Grows

In November 1972, despite the growing scandal over the Watergate break-in, Nixon handily won reelection, crushing Sen. George McGovern, Nixon's preferred opponent. Nixon then reached out to Johnson seeking his help in squelching Democratic-led investigations of the Watergate affair and slyly noting that Johnson had ordered wiretaps of Nixon's campaign in 1968.

Johnson reacted angrily to the overture, refusing to cooperate. On Jan. 20, 1973, Nixon was sworn in for his second term. On Jan. 22, 1973, Johnson died of a heart attack.

In the weeks that followed Nixon's Inauguration and Johnson's death, the scandal over the Watergate cover-up grew more serious, creeping ever closer to the Oval Office. Meanwhile, Rostow struggled to decide what he should do with "The 'X' Envelope."

On May 14, 1973, in a three-page "memorandum for the record," Rostow summarized what was in "The 'X' Envelope" and provided a chronology for the events in fall 1968. Rostow reflected, too, on what effect LBJ's public silence then may have

had on the unfolding Watergate scandal.

"I am inclined to believe the Republican operation in 1968 relates in two ways to the Watergate affair of 1972," Rostow wrote. He noted, first, that Nixon's operatives may have judged that their "enterprise with the South Vietnamese" in frustrating Johnson's last-ditch peace initiative had secured Nixon his narrow margin of victory over Hubert Humphrey in 1968.

"Second, they got away with it," Rostow wrote. "Despite considerable press commentary after the election, the matter was never investigated fully. Thus, as the same men faced the election in 1972, there was nothing in their previous experience with an operation of doubtful propriety (or, even, legality) to warn them off, and there were memories of how close an election could get and the possible utility of pressing to the limit and beyond." [To read Rostow's memo, [click here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).]

Tie to Watergate

What Rostow didn't know was that there was a third and more direct connection between the missing file and Watergate. Nixon's fear about the evidence in the file surfacing as a follow-up to the Pentagon Papers was Nixon's motive for creating Hunt's burglary team in the first place.

Rostow apparently struggled with what to do with the file for the next month as the Watergate scandal expanded. On June 25, 1973, fired White House counsel John Dean delivered his blockbuster Senate testimony, claiming that Nixon got involved in the cover-up within days of the June 1972 burglary at the Democratic National Committee. Dean also asserted that Watergate was just part of a years-long program of political espionage directed by Nixon's White House.

The very next day, as headlines of Dean's testimony filled the nation's newspapers, Rostow reached his conclusion about what to do with "The 'X' Envelope." In longhand, he wrote a ["Top Secret" note](#) which read, "To be opened by the Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, not earlier than fifty (50) years from this date June 26, 1973."

In other words, Rostow intended this missing link of American history to stay missing for another half century. In a [typed cover letter](#) to LBJ Library director Harry Middleton, Rostow wrote: "Sealed in the attached envelope is a file President Johnson asked me to hold personally because of its sensitive nature. In case of his death, the material was to be consigned to the LBJ Library under conditions I judged to be appropriate.

"After fifty years the Director of the LBJ Library (or whomever may inherit his responsibilities, should the administrative structure of the National Archives

change) may, alone, open this file. If he believes the material it contains should not be opened for research [at that time], I would wish him empowered to re-close the file for another fifty years when the procedure outlined above should be repeated.”

Ultimately, however, the LBJ Library didn't wait that long. After a little more than two decades, on July 22, 1994, the envelope was opened and the archivists began the long process of declassifying the contents.

Yet, by withholding the file on Nixon's "treason," Johnson and Rostow allowed for incomplete and distorted histories of the Vietnam War and Watergate to take shape and for Nixon and his Republican cohorts to escape the full opprobrium that they deserved.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
