

A USS Liberty's Hero's Passing

On the 52nd anniversary of the attack on the USS Liberty, Ray McGovern focuses on Terry Halbardier, who sent the SOS that saved the ship from Israeli destruction.

This article was written in 2014 on the occasion of Halbardier's death.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News

Terry Halbardier, who as a 23-year old seaman in 1967 thwarted Israeli attempts to sink the USS Liberty, died on Aug. 11 in Visalia, California. It took the U.S. government 42 years after the attack to recognize Halbardier's heroism by awarding him the Silver Star, a delay explained by Washington's determination to downplay Israeli responsibility for the 34 Americans killed and the 174 wounded.

On June 8, 1967, during the Six-Day War, the Israeli military attacked the USS Liberty, an American spy ship which had been monitoring Israeli transmissions about the conflict. Intercepted Israeli communications indicated that the goal was to sink the Liberty and leave no survivors.

Warplanes and torpedo boats had already killed 34 and wounded 174, when Halbardier slid over the Liberty's napalm-glazed deck to jury-rig an antenna and get an SOS off to the Sixth Fleet. The Israelis intercepted the SOS and broke off the attack immediately. In effect, Halbardier prevented the massacre of all 294 onboard. Still, the infamy of the attack

on the Liberty was two-fold.

First, the Liberty, a virtually defenseless intelligence collection platform prominently flying an American flag in international waters, came under deliberate attack by Israeli aircraft and three 60-ton Israeli torpedo boats off the coast of the Sinai on a cloudless June afternoon during the six-day Israeli-Arab war. Second, President Lyndon Johnson called back carrier aircraft dispatched to defend the Liberty lest Israel be embarrassed, the start of an unconscionable cover-up, including top Navy brass, that persists to this day.

Given all they have been through, the Liberty survivors and other veterans who joined Halbardier to celebrate his belated receipt of the Silver Star on May 27, 2009 can be forgiven for having doubted that the day of the hero's recognition would ever come.

In the award ceremony at the Visalia (California) office of Rep. Devin Nunes, the Republican congressman pinned the Silver Star next to the Purple Heart that Halbardier found in his home mailbox three years ago. Nunes said, "The government has kept this quiet I think for too long, and I felt as my constituent he [Halbardier] needed to get recognized for the services he made to his country."

Nunes got that right. Despite the many indignities the Liberty crew has been subjected to, the mood in Visalia was pronouncedly a joyous one of Better (42 years) Late Than Never. And, it did take some time for the moment to sink in: Wow, a gutsy congressman not afraid to let the truth hang out on this delicate issue.

Treatment Accorded the Skipper

I was present that day and I could not get out of my head the contrast between this simple, uncomplicated event and the earlier rigmarole that senior Navy officers went through to pin a richly deserved Medal of Honor on another hero of that day, the Liberty's skipper, Captain William McGonagle.

Although badly wounded by Israeli fire on June 8, 1967, McGonagle was able to keep the bombed, torpedoed, napalmed Liberty afloat and limping toward Malta, where what was left of the bodies of the 34 crewmen killed and the 174 wounded could be attended to. Do the math: yes, killed and wounded amounted to more than two-thirds of the Liberty crew of 294.

I remembered what a naval officer involved in McGonagle's award ceremony told one of the Liberty crew: "The government is pretty jumpy about Israel the State Department even asked the Israeli ambassador if his government had any objections to McGonagle getting the medal."

When McGonagle received his award, the White House (the normal venue for a Medal of Honor award) was all booked up, it seems, and President Lyndon Johnson (who would have been the usual presenter) was unavailable.

So it fell to the Secretary of the Navy to sneak off to the Washington Navy Yard on the banks of the acrid Anacostia River, where he presented McGonagle with the Medal of Honor and a citation that described the attack but not the identity of the attackers.

Please don't misunderstand. The Liberty crew is not big on ceremony. They are VERY-not-big on politicians who wink when

Navy comrades are killed and wounded at sea. The Liberty survivors are big on getting the truth out about what actually happened that otherwise beautiful day in June 1967.

The award of the Silver Star to Terry Halbardier marked a significant step in the direction of truth telling. Halbardier said he accepted his Silver Star on behalf of the entire 294-man crew. He and fellow survivor Don Pageler expressed particular satisfaction at the wording of the citation, which stated explicitly – with none of the usual fudging – the identity of the attackers: “The USS Liberty was attacked by Israeli aircraft and motor torpedo boats in the East Mediterranean Sea.”

In the past, official citations, like Captain McGonagle’s, had avoided mentioning Israel by name when alluding to the attack. I think former U.S. Ambassador Edward Peck put it best in condemning this kind of approach as “obsequious, unctuous subservience to the peripheral interests of a foreign nation at the cost of the lives and morale of our own service members and their families.” Strong words for a diplomat. But right on.

Just a Guy From Texas

Were it not for Halbardier’s bravery, ingenuity, and technical expertise, the USS Liberty would surely have sunk, taking down much if not all of the crew.

You see, the first thing the Israeli aircraft bombed and strafed were the Liberty’s communications antennae and other equipment. They succeeded in destroying all the antennae that were functional. One antenna on the port side, though, had been out of commission and had escaped damage.

In receiving the Silver Star, Halbardier made light of his heroism, claiming that he was just a guy from Texas who could do a whole lot with simple stuff like baling wire. (In the infantry we called this kind of thing a "field expedient.")

In any case, with his can-do attitude and his technical training, he figured he might be able to get that particular antenna working again. But first he would have to repair a cable that had been destroyed on deck and then connect the antenna to a transmitter.

The deck was still being strafed, but Halbardier grabbed a reel of cable, ran out onto the deck, and attached new cable to the antenna so a radioman could get an SOS out to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.

Voila. "Mayday" went out; almost immediately the Israeli aircraft and torpedo ships broke off the attack and went back to base; the Israeli government sent a quick apology to Washington for its unfortunate "mistake;" and President Johnson issued orders to everyone to make believe the Israelis were telling the truth, or at least to remain silent.

To their discredit, top Navy brass went along, and the Liberty survivors were threatened with court martial and prison if they so much as mentioned to their wives what had actually happened. They were enjoined as well from discussing it with one another.

As Liberty crewman Don Pageler put it, "We all headed out after that, and we didn't talk to each other." The circumstances were ready-made for serious Post-Traumatic

Stress Disorder.

The stories shared by Liberty survivors after the award ceremony, including descriptions of the macabre but necessary effort to reassemble torpedoed body parts, and the plague of survivor's guilt, were as heart-rending as any I have heard. They are stories that should be shared more widely for those muzzled far too long.

These were the deep emotional scars to supplement the ones all over Halbardier's body, some of which he uncovered when asked by the local press gathered there in Visalia. Typically, Halbardier made light of the shrapnel that had to be plucked out of his flesh, emphasizing that he was lucky compared to some of the other crew.

No Mistake

Despite Israeli protestations, the accumulated evidence, including intercepted voice communications, is such that no serious observer believes Israel's "Oops" excuse of a terrible mistake. The following exchanges are excerpts of testimony from U.S. military and diplomatic officials given to Alison Weir, founder of "If Americans Knew" and author of *American Media Miss the Boat*:

Israeli pilot to ground control: "This is an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?"

Ground control: "Yes, follow orders."

"But sir, it's an American ship, I can see the flag!"

Ground control: "Never mind; hit it!"

Haviland Smith, a CIA officer stationed in Beirut during the

Six-Day War, says he was told that the transcripts were "deep-sixed," because the U.S. government did not want to embarrass Israel.

Equally telling is the fact that the National Security Agency (NSA) destroyed voice tapes seen by many intelligence analysts, showing that the Israelis knew exactly what they were doing. I asked a former CIA colleague, who was also an analyst at that time, what he remembered of those circumstances. Here is his e-mail reply:

"The chief of the analysts studying the Arab-Israeli region at the time told me about the intercepted messages and said very flatly and firmly that the pilots reported seeing the American flag and repeated their requests of confirmation of the attack order. Whole platoons of Americans saw those intercepts. If NSA now says they do not exist, then someone ordered them destroyed."

One need hardly add at this point that the destruction of evidence without investigation is an open invitation to repetition in the future. Think the more recent torture-interrogation videotapes.

As for the legal side: the late Captain Ward Boston, unburdened himself on his accomplice role as the Navy lawyer appointed as senior counsel to Adm. Isaac Kidd, who led a one-week (!) investigation and then followed orders to pronounce the attack on the Liberty a case of "mistaken identity." Boston signed a formal declaration on Jan. 8, 2004, in which he said he was "outraged at the efforts of the apologists for Israel in this country to claim that this attack was a case of 'mistaken identity.'" Boston continued:

“The evidence was clear. Both Adm. Kidd and I believed with certainty that this attack was a deliberate effort to sink an American ship and murder its entire crew. Not only did the Israelis attack the ship with napalm, gunfire, and missiles, Israeli torpedo boats machine-gunned three lifeboats that had been launched in an attempt by the crew to save the most seriously wounded, a war crime

“I know from personal conversations I had with Adm. Kidd that President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara ordered him to conclude that the attack was a case of ‘mistaken identity’ despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.”

W. Patrick Lang, Col., USA (ret.), who was the Defense Intelligence Agency’s top analyst for the Middle East for eight years, recounted the Israeli air attacks as follows: “The flight leader spoke to his base to report that he had the ship in view, that it was the same ship he had been briefed on, and that it was clearly marked with the U.S. flag

“The flight commander was reluctant. That was very clear. He didn’t want to do this. He asked them a couple of times, ‘Do you really want me to do this?’ I’ve remembered it ever since. It was very striking. I’ve been harboring this memory for all these years.”

Lang, of course, is not alone. So too Terry Halbardier, who told those assembled at his Silver Medal award ceremony, “I think about it [the attack on the Liberty] every day.”

Why Sink the Ship?

What we know for sure is, as the independent commission headed by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Thomas Moorer put it, the attack "was a deliberate attempt to destroy an American ship and kill her entire crew."

What we do not know for sure is why the Israelis wanted that done. Has no one dared ask the Israelis? One view is that the Israelis did not want the United States to find out they were massing troops to seize the Golan Heights from Syria and wanted to deprive the U.S. of the opportunity to argue against such a move.

James Bamford offers an alternative view in his excellent book, *Body of Secrets*. Bamford adduces evidence, including reporting from an Israeli journalist eyewitness and an Israeli military historian, of wholesale killing of Egyptian prisoners of war at the coastal town of El Arish in the Sinai.

The Liberty was patrolling directly opposite El Arish in international waters but within easy range to pick up intelligence on what was going on there. And the Israelis were well aware of that. But the important thing here is not to confuse what we know (the deliberate nature of the Israeli attack) with the ultimate purpose behind it, which remains open to speculation.

Also worth noting is the conventional wisdom prevalent in our Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) that Egypt forced Israel into war in June 1967. An excellent, authoritative source has debunked that, none other than former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin! In an unguarded moment in 1982, when he was prime minister, he admitted publicly:

“In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [Egyptian President] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

Thus, the Israeli attack admittedly amounted to starting a war of aggression, and the occupied West Bank territories and the Golan Heights gained by the Israelis in the 1967 war remain occupied to this day. The post World War II tribunal at Nuremberg distinguished a “war of aggression” from other war crimes, terming it the “supreme international crime, differing from other war crimes only in that it contains the accumulated evil of the whole.”

Perhaps the attempt to sink the Liberty and finish off all survivors qualifies as one of those accumulated evils. Terry Halbardier summed it up this way when he was awarded his Silver Star: “There’s lots of theories but let’s just say they didn’t want us listening in to what they wanted to do.”

Getting Away With Murder

In sum, on June 8, 1967, the Israeli government learned that it could get away with murder, literally, and the crime would be covered up, so strong is the influence of the Israel Lobby in our Congress, and indeed, in the White House. And those USS Liberty veterans who survived well enough to call for an independent investigation have been hit with charges of, you guessed it, anti-Semitism.

Does all this have relevance today? Of course. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu understands that there is little

that Israel could do that would earn the opprobrium of the U.S. Congress or retaliation from the White House, whether it's building illegal settlements or slaughtering civilians in Gaza. The Israelis seem convinced they remain in the catbird's seat, largely because of the Israel Lobby's influence with U.S. lawmakers and opinion makers.

One of the few moments when a U.S. official has had the audacity to face Israel down came from significantly a U.S. Navy admiral. In early July 2008, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, was sent to Israel to read the riot act to then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who seemed to be itching to start hostilities with Iran while President George W. Bush was in office.

We learned from the Israeli press that Mullen, fearing some form of Israeli provocation, went so far as to warn the Israelis not to even think about another incident like the attack on the USS Liberty on June 8, 1967, that the Israelis should disabuse themselves of the notion that U.S. military support would be knee-jerk automatic if Israel somehow provoked open hostilities with Iran.

This is the only occasion I am aware of in which a U.S. official of such seniority braced Israel about the Liberty incident. A gutsy move, especially with Vice President Dick Cheney and national security aide Elliott Abrams then in the White House, two hawks who might well bless, or even encourage, an Israeli provocation that would make it very difficult for Washington to avoid springing to the defense of its "ally."

The Israelis know that Mullen knows that the attack on the

Liberty was deliberate. Mullen could have raised no more neuralgic an issue to take a shot across an Israeli bow than to cite the attack on the Liberty. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Mullen cautioned that a Liberty-type incident must be avoided in any future military actions in the Middle East.

Perhaps Mullen had learned something from the heroism of Terry Halbardier

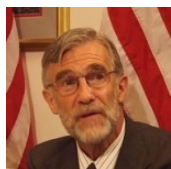
Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. After serving as an Army infantry/intelligence officer, he spent a 27-year career as a CIA analyst. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Ahed Tamimi and Her Mother are Freed from Jail

Ahed Tamimi and her mother were freed from prison on Sunday. Ray McGovern looks back on when he met the Tamimi family last year in their West Bank village and reflects on the spirit that drives them.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



When they left prison on Sunday Ahed Tamimi and her mother Nariman received a hard-earned heros' welcome from Palestinians and others opposed to Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestinian lands seized in 1948 and enlarged by the Israeli army in 1967.

Ahed was 16 years old last December when an Israeli soldier shot her cousin in the face. The next day Israeli soldiers menacingly showed up at her house in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh. What would you do?

Ahed slapped one of the armed-to-the-teeth soldiers. While some Israeli politicians said she should be put away for life and others demanded a sentence of at least ten years, the Israeli occupiers sentenced her to eight months for the slap seen around the world. She spent her 17th birthday in prison. Her mother Nariman filmed the incident and was thrown in jail too, this time for incitement. (It was not the activist Nariman's first time in an Israeli prison.)

The Israeli authorities are so worried about the symbol for resistance that Ahed has become internationally that on Saturday, a day before her release, they arrested two Italian artists who had painted a large portrait of her on the separation wall near Bethlehem.

Most Americans – except for the relatively few who have spent more than a few days in Israeli-occupied territories – find it hard to understand why Palestinians like Nariman and Ahed “persist.” Most people in the U.S. are blissfully unaware of the history of Palestine and of the continuing injustices inflicted on its people today. The explanation for this lies largely in the way the U.S. mass media reports the story, almost entirely from the Israelis' point of view.

For those malnourished on Establishment media, here's a bit of history, without which it is impossible to understand the anger and the courage-against-all-odds shown by those who continue to use what they have – even their open palms – to make clear that they will never acquiesce in Israeli occupation.

How a Homeland Gets Occupied

The Israeli attack starting the Six-Day War in early June 1967 fits snugly into the category of “war of aggression” as defined by the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal. “Pre-emptive” attacks, when there is nothing to pre-empt, are now – post Iraq war – labeled more euphemistically as “wars of choice,” but that too fits the Nuremberg definition.

To begin to appreciate the injustices inflicted on millions of Palestinians, whose land Israel coveted for itself, one must un-learn the legend that in attacking its neighbors in 1967 Israel was acting in self-defense. None other than then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1977 – 83) undermined that piece of propaganda in a speech to the U.S. National Defense University on August 8, 1982. (Apparently, even accomplished dissimulators get cocky on occasion and let the truth slip out.) Here are Begin's words:

“In June, 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [President Gamal Abdel] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him. ... The

government decided unanimously: we will take the initiative and attack the enemy, drive him back, and thus assure the security of Israel and the future of the nation.”

And now, a half-century after its successful six-day war of aggression with U.S. backing, Israel has been unlawfully colonizing the occupied territories, oppressing the Palestinians still living there, and thumbing its nose at UN Security Council Resolution 242. It was approved unanimously on Nov. 22, 1967, calling on Israel to withdraw from the lands it seized in June of that year. That was then.

And This is Now ...

In February–March 2017, I was part of a small Veterans For Peace delegation in Palestine. One of our last visits was to a village named Nabi Saleh, where Ahed’s father Bassem Tamimi, his wife Nariman, and Ahed’s three siblings live when they are not in prison. Her older brother is in prison now. After two weeks of experiencing what life is like for Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, I had a chance to ask Bassem about the nonviolent, but frontal, resistance to Israeli occupation and colonization.

“Your sons have been beaten and badly wounded and one’s still in prison; your wife is in and out of prison: your brother-in-law was killed by a sniper bullet; you yourself have been tortured in prison; your house is on the list for demolition – why do you persist; why encourage such actions?” I asked.

“We have no alternative,” Bassem replied matter-of-factly, “it is our land and our life. I will not tell my children or my people to acquiesce in the Israeli occupation – ever.”

The following day we Veterans For Peace took part in a protest march to the separation Wall. Later, underneath the tear-gas and sheltered from the ensuing rifle fire, we watched the teens of Nabi Saleh dodge the Israeli soldiers chasing them through the village for two hours. When the Israeli soldiers, so heavily burdened with weaponry they could hardly run, finally went back behind their Wall, the young folk emerged shouting, “We won.” It was a privilege to be there to welcome them back to the Tamimi house and some relative peace and quiet.

Chris Smiley, our delegation videographer, created an excellent 38-minute documentary as part of a series on our experience in Nabi Saleh called: “One Day, One Village, One Family.”

The Palestinian Spirit is Universal

Ahed “Didn’t Get It From the Moon”. This is the expression my Irish grandmother would use to make it clear that tribute and praise should go to the seed-sowers as well as the protagonists themselves. Other traditions use some variant of: “The apple does not fall far from the tree.” Suffice it to say that, from what I was able to witness of the attitude and behavior of Ahed and her three brothers, they are clearly determined to honor the rich legacy of courage and Palestinian patriotism they inherit from Bassem and Nariman – and not only from them.

One might say that Ahed and her siblings are honor graduates of the Bassem/Nariman Folk School, just as Rosa Parks was a graduate of The Highlander Folk School. The common curriculum has to do with courageous persistence in the pursuit of justice. Moreover, our delegation was to discover that Rosa Parks is a revered figure in the Israeli Knesset – well, at least in the modest conference room allocated to Arab members.

Hanging prominently on the main wall were pictures of Rosa Parks, as well as of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. And now I can hear Ahed Tamimi’s voice beneath that of Rosa Parks, who explained in 1992:

“I did not want to be mistreated ... It was just time... there was opportunity for me to take a stand to express the way I felt about being treated in that manner. I had not planned to get arrested. ... But when I had to face that decision, I didn’t hesitate to do so because I felt that we had endured that too long. The more we gave in, the more we complied with that kind of treatment, the more oppressive it became.”

Nonetheless, they persisted.

Welcome home, Ahed and Nariman.

Miko Peled, son of an Israeli general and critic of Israel’s Palestine policy, shot this video on Sunday and sent it to McGovern.

[Miko Video](#)

Ray McGovern works with a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A former Army officer and CIA analyst, he was a member of the Veterans For Peace delegation visiting Palestine in early 2017.

If you enjoyed this original article please consider [making a donation to Consortium News](#) so we can bring you more stories like this one.

Israel's 'Legitimacy' War

There are legitimate questions about the legitimacy of Israel's endless repression of the Palestinian people, but Israel and its backers have now declared such questions illegitimate as they mount a new propaganda war against Israel's "delegitimization," says John V. Whitbeck.

By John V. Whitbeck

June 5 marked the 48th anniversary of the "preemptive" attack on Egypt with which Israel launched the fateful "Six-Day War" that permitted the Zionist movement to complete its conquest of historical Palestine.

As the "State of Palestine" (the legal designation for the 22 percent of historical Palestine conquered in 1967, which is now recognized as a state by 136 other states and the United Nations) enters its 49th year of an apparently perpetual occupation by the State of Israel, the Israeli government and its friends in the United States are mobilizing to fight a new war a "Legitimacy War" against the "delegitimization" of "Israel."

The quotation marks around "Israel" are intended to emphasize a fundamental point: When Israelis and their friends speak of the "delegitimization" of Israel or of Israel's "right to exist," they are not referring to the legitimacy or continued existence of any physical territory or of any group of people. They are referring to the legitimacy or continued existence of the particular ethno-religious-supremacist political system established in 1948 on the territory previously named Palestine, a territory in which the current population is roughly 50 percent Jewish and 50 percent Palestinian.

Why has "delegitimization" suddenly become such an existential threat to "Israel"?

Until relatively recently, very few people seriously questioned the continued existence of "Israel" either because they considered the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the dispossession and dispersal of the Palestinian people to make room for a "Jewish State" to be a good thing or because they considered it, like the genocide of the indigenous peoples of North America to make room for European colonists and their African slaves, to be an irreversible injustice, not worth thinking about any more.

Until relatively recently, the world's attention has been focused on ending the occupation of the portion of Palestine conquered in 1967, in large part because that more recent injustice was assumed to be reversible through a "two-state

solution.”

However, as Israeli leaders have become more honest and explicit about the perpetual nature of their occupation of the State of Palestine and about their deeply held belief that there is no difference between the portion of Palestine conquered in 1948 and the portion of Palestine conquered in 1967, both being their god’s gift to them and to them alone, the world’s attention has begun to broaden, both regarding the possibilities of the future and regarding the realities of the past.

In the face of the clear Israeli intention to maintain the current undemocratic and discriminatory system of “one state with two systems,” many people have started to look again at the seminal injustice, the original sin, of 1948 and at the inherent nature of political Zionism and to think seriously about the desirability of reforming and transforming ethno-religious-supremacist “Israel” into a fully democratic state with equal rights and human dignity for all who live there the same political system which Western governments profess and proclaim to be the ideal form of government for all other states.

Of course, nothing would be more likely to make Israelis question the sustainability of their very comfortable status quo and become seriously interested in actually achieving a decent “two-state solution” than a realization that both Western public opinion and Western governments are starting to question both the “rightness” of how “Israel” came into existence and the legitimacy in the 21st century of an ethno-religious-supremacist regime, whether it calls itself “the Jewish State” or “the Islamic State.”

Hence the sudden rise of the existential threat of the “delegitimization” of “Israel.” Yet, no one has done more to delegitimize “Israel” in the eyes of the world than Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Perhaps those who seek equal rights, equal human dignity and some measure of justice, whether in two states or in one, should hope that Mr. Netanyahu keeps up his good work in the “Legitimacy War.”

John V. Whitbeck is an international lawyer who has advised the Palestinian negotiating team in negotiations with Israel.

Netanyahu’s False Narrative

As members of the U.S. Congress bobbed up and down with applause, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu spun a tale of brave little Israel fretting about its

survival, but he left out the fact that Israel has a large arsenal of nuclear weapons and has often been the one to invade its neighbors, as Marjorie Cohn recalls.

By Marjorie Cohn

On March 3, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued an impassioned plea to Congress to protect Israel by opposing diplomacy with Iran. Referring to “the remarkable alliance between Israel and the United States” which includes “generous military assistance and missile defense,” Netanyahu failed to mention that Israel has an arsenal of 100 or 200 nuclear weapons.

The day before he delivered that controversial address, Netanyahu expressed similar sentiments to AIPAC, Israel’s powerful U.S. lobby. He reiterated the claim that Israel acted in the 1967 Six-Day War “to defend itself.” The narrative that Israel attacked Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in self-defense, seizing the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula in 1967, has remained largely unquestioned in the public discourse.

Israel relies on that narrative to continue occupying those Palestinian lands. And the powerful film “Censored Voices,” which premiered at Sundance in February, does not challenge that narrative.

But declassified high-level documents from Britain, France, Russia and the United States reveal that Egypt, Syria and Jordan were not going to attack Israel and Israel knew it. In fact, they did not attack Israel. Instead, Israel mounted the first attack in order to decimate the Egyptian army and take the West Bank.

For two weeks following the Six Day War, Amos Oz and Avrahim Shapira visited Israeli kibbutzim and recorded interviews with several Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers who had just returned from that war. Largely censored by the Israeli government for many years, those reels have finally been made public. “Censored Voices” features the taped voices of young IDF soldiers, as the aging, former soldiers sit silently beside the tape recorder, listening to their own voices.

The testimonies documented in the tapes reveal evidence of targeting civilians and summarily executing prisoners, which constitute war crimes. A soldier asks himself, “They’re civilians should I kill them or not?” He replies, “I didn’t even think about it. Just kill! Kill everyone you see.”

Likewise, one voice notes, “Several times we captured guys, positioned them and just killed them.” Another reveals, “In the war, we all became murderers.” Still

another says, "Not only did this war not solve the state's problems, but it complicated them in a way that'll be very hard to solve."

One soldier likens evacuating Arab villages to what the Nazis did to Jews in Europe. As a soldier watched an Arab man being taken from his home, the soldier states, "I had an abysmal feeling that I was evil."

In what proved to be a prescient question, one soldier asks, "Are we doomed to bomb villages every decade for defensive purposes?" Indeed, Israel justifies all of its assaults on Gaza as self-defense, even though Israel invariably attacks first, and kills overwhelming numbers of Palestinians mostly civilians. Each time, many fewer Israelis are killed by Palestinian rockets.

Israel's False Self-Defense Claim

The film begins by showing a map of Israel surrounded by Egypt, Syria and Jordan, with arrows from each country aimed at Israel. The IDF soldiers felt those Arab countries posed an existential threat to Israel.

"There was a feeling it would be a Holocaust," one soldier observed. The Israeli media claimed at the time that Egypt had attacked Israel by land and by air on June 5, 1967. According to British journalist Patrick Seale, "Israel's preparation of opinion" was "brilliantly managed," a "remarkable exercise in psychological warfare."

In his book, *The Six-Day War and Israeli Self-Defense: Questioning the Legal Basis for Preventive War*, published by Cambridge University Press, Ohio State University law professor John Quigley documents conversations by high government officials in Israel, the United States, Egypt, the Soviet Union, France, and Britain leading up to the Six-Day War.

He draws on minutes of British cabinet meetings, a French government publication, U.S. documents in "Foreign Relations of the United States," and Russian national archives. Those conversations make clear that Israel knew Egypt, Syria and Jordan would not and did not attack Israel, and that Israel initiated the attacks.

Egypt was the only one of the three Arab countries that had a military of any consequence. Israeli General Yitzhak Rabin told the Israeli cabinet that the Egyptian forces maintained a defensive posture, and Israeli General Meir Amit, head of Mossad (Israeli's intelligence agency), informed U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara that Egypt was not poised to attack Israel. Both the United States and the Soviet Union urged Israel not to attack. Nevertheless, Israel's cabinet voted on June 4 to authorize the IDF to invade Egypt.

“After the cabinet vote,” Quigley writes, “informal discussion turned to ways to make it appear that Israel was not starting a war when in fact that was precisely what it was doing.”

Moshe Dayan, who would soon become Israel’s Minister of Defense, ordered military censorship, saying, “For the first twenty-four hours, we have to be the victims.” Dayan admitted in his memoirs, “We had taken the first step in the war with Egypt.” Nevertheless, Israel’s UN Ambassador Gideon Rafael reported to the Security Council that Israel had acted in self-defense.

“The hostilities were attacks by the Israeli air force on multiple Egyptian airfields, aimed at demolishing Egyptian aircraft on the ground,” according to Quigley. On June 5, the CIA told President Lyndon B. Johnson, “Israel fired the first shots today.”

Article 51 of the UN Charter authorizes states to act in collective self-defense after another member state suffers an armed attack. Although Jordan and Syria responded to the Israeli attacks on Egypt, they and Egypt – inflicted little damage to Israel. By the afternoon of June 5, Israel “had virtually destroyed the air war capacity of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria,” Quigley notes. “The IDF achieved the ‘utter defeat’ of the Egyptian army on June 7 and 8.”

United States Empowers Israel

U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk said that U.S. officials were “angry as hell, when the Israelis launched their surprise offensive.” Yet, Quigley notes, “Israel’s gamble paid off in that the United States would not challenge Israel’s story about how the fighting started. Even though it quickly saw through the story, the White House kept its analysis to itself.”

Although Security Council resolution 242, passed in 1967, refers to “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and calls for “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” Israel continues to occupy the Palestinian territories it acquired in the Six-Day War.

Israel has abandoned its claim that Egypt attacked first. Yet the international community considers that Israel acted in lawful anticipatory self-defense. Quigley explains how the UN Charter only permits the use of armed force after an armed attack on a UN member state; it does not authorize anticipatory, preventive, or preemptive self-defense.

“The UN did not condemn Israel in 1967 for its attack on Egypt,” Antonio Cassese

of the University of Florence explained. Quigley attributes this to Cold War politics, as the USSR supported Egypt. “For the United States in particular, Israel’s success was a Cold War defeat for the USSR. The United States was hardly prepared to condemn Israel after it performed this service.”

The United States continues to support Israel by sending it \$3 billion per year in military aid, even when Israel attacks Gaza with overwhelming firepower, as it did in the summer of 2014, killing 2,100 Palestinians (mostly civilians). Sixty-six Israeli soldiers and seven civilians were killed.

If Israel were to mount an attack on Iran, the United States would invariably support Israel against Iran and any Arab country that goes to Iran’s defense. Indeed, Netanyahu intoned to Congress, “may Israel and America always stand together.”

Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*.

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.

Applying the Six-Day War to Iran

Exclusive: America’s neocons continue to beat the drums for war with Iran, brushing aside warnings even from Israeli intelligence veterans. Another part of the propaganda is to merge a future war against Iran with the heroic memories of the Six-Day War nearly 45 years ago, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern notes.

By Ray McGovern

With the 45th anniversary of the Six-Day War of June 1967 coming early next month, pro-Israel pundits like syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer are

again promoting Israel's faux-narrative on the reasons behind Israel's decision to attack its neighbors.

The Krauthammers of our domesticated, corporate media seem bent on waging preemptive war against an accurate historical rendering of the actual objectives behind that Israeli offensive that overwhelmed Arab armies and seized large swaths of Arab territory, land that hard-line Zionists refer to as "Greater Israel," i.e. rightly theirs.

With its surprise attacks on June 5, 1967, Israel rapidly defeated the armies of its Arab neighbors. It gained control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

The Sinai was returned to Egypt in 1979 as a result of the Camp David peace accord, a land-for-peace swap that U.S. President Jimmy Carter demanded and that then-Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin deeply resented.

Jewish settlement has proceeded apace on other territories conquered in the Six-Day War, particularly in the Palestinian West Bank, which Israel's ruling Likud Party refers to by its Biblical names Judea and Samaria.

Likud's charter declares that "the Jewish communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza are the realization of Zionist values. Settlement of the land is a clear expression of the unassailable right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. The Likud will continue to strengthen and develop these communities and will prevent their uprooting."

In other words, in the Six-Day War, Israel seized land that hard-line Zionists consider to be part of their ancestral legacy. The surprise attack in 1967 was the means to that end. The Likud Party emerged several years later with the explicit intent of consolidating that control through a settlement policy called "changing the facts on the ground."

Time to Worry

Yet, despite Israel's continued expansion into those Palestinian lands, pro-Israel pundits are in a defensive mood these days, and with good reason. They see a particular need this year to whitewash Israel's surprise attack on its Arab neighbors 45 years ago not only because the anniversary is likely to draw more than the usual attention but also because Israel's strategic position has deteriorated markedly in the past year.

For instance, the 80 million-plus Egyptians are no longer neutered by the joint Mubarak-Israel-U.S. effort to repress them and co-opt them into passivity vis-

À-vis the Palestinians. Serious contenders in the upcoming Egyptian election have said they would reconsider the Egypt-Israel Treaty of 1979.

Some leading Egyptian politicians have added that they would fling wide open Egypt's border with Gaza, where about 1.5 million Palestinians live in what amounts to an open-air prison. These Egyptians also are saying strongly sympathetic things about the widespread suffering in Gaza and the West Bank.

Equally important, Egypt's present government has already nullified the sweetheart arrangement under which Egypt was providing natural gas to Israel at bargain basement prices. (That alone is a very big deal.)

And, in sad contrast to the deafening silence of senior American officials regarding Israel's reckless killing of U.S. citizens, such as Rachel Corrie in 2003, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to demand an apology for Israel's killing of Turkish citizens aboard the Mavi Marmara on May 31, 2010.

The result of that dispute is a sharp diminution in what used to be very close military ties between Turkey and Israel, not to mention a lot of ill will, which can be very corrosive over the longer run.

Misinformed Americans

Regarding the events of 1967, America's pro-Israel pundit class knows only too well that Egyptians, Turks, Syrians, Jordanians and other audiences in the Middle East will not buy Israel's faux-history of the Six-Day War, many having been on the receiving end of it.

Thus, it is abundantly clear that the primary targets of the disinformation are Americans like those who subscribe to the neoconservative *Washington Post*, whose editors in recent decades have been careful to keep their readers malnourished on the thin gruel of watered-down (or unreliable) facts about the Middle East (think, Iraq's WMDs).

So, it would be simply too much to acknowledge, as former Israeli Prime Minister Begin did 30 years ago, in an uncommon burst of hubris-tinged honesty, that Israel's attack on its neighbors in 1967 was in no way a defensive war, or even a "pre-emptive" war (there being no really dangerous Egyptian or other threat to pre-empt).

While Prime Minister in 1982, Begin declared: "In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches (did) not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him."

Such real history would lift the veil now shrouding Israel's version that plays up the "threat" posed by Egypt and disguises the grand enterprise to expand Israel's borders and, in double-contravention of international law, to colonize the occupied territories.

To bolster Israel's heroic rendition of the Six-Day War and to apply its supposed lessons to Israel's current plans to bomb Iran Krauthammer reprised that triumphal version of Israel masterfully defending itself against imminent destruction by the Arabs.

"On June 5 (1967), Israel launched a preemptive strike on the Egyptian air force, then proceeded to lightning victories on three fronts," Krauthammer wrote, cooing: "The Six-Day War is legend."

He then overlaid that gauzy history onto today's confrontation with Iran: "Israelis today face the greatest threat to their existence, nuclear weapons in the hands of apocalyptic mullahs publicly pledged to Israel's annihilation, since May '67. The world is again telling Israelis to do nothing as it looks for a way out. But if such a way is not found, as in '67, Israelis know that they will once again have to defend themselves, by themselves."

Noting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent coalition with the rival Kadima Party, Krauthammer also mocked the importance of former Israeli intelligence chiefs cautioning against a rush to war with Iran.

He wrote: "So much for the recent media hype about some great domestic resistance to Netanyahu's hard line on Iran. Two notable retired intelligence figures were widely covered here for coming out against him. Little noted was that one had been passed over by Netanyahu to be the head of Mossad, while the other had been fired by Netanyahu as Mossad chief (hence the job opening).

"The [new] wall-to-wall coalition demonstrates Israel's *political* readiness to attack, if necessary. (Its military readiness is not in doubt.) Those counseling Israeli submission, resignation or just endless patience can no longer dismiss Israel's tough stance as the work of irredeemable right-wingers."

After reading this Krauthammer op-ed in the May 10 *Washington Post*, I decided, against my better judgment, to invest a half-hour writing a letter to the editor, trying to make it as factual as possible. Several days after its submission, I have given up any meager hope I may have harbored that the *Post* would actually print it.

Perhaps that half-hour investment will not have been a complete waste of time if I can share the result with you:

Letter to the Editor, *Washington Post*, May 13, 2012

In his May 10 op-ed column, "Echoes of '67: Israel unites," Charles Krauthammer refers to May 1967 as "Israel's most fearful, desperate month" and compares it to today, claiming that Iran poses "the greatest threat" to Israel's existence.

It ain't necessarily so. In August 1982, then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin admitted publicly: "In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches (did) not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him."

Today's "threat" from Iran is equally ephemeral. Krauthammer, though, warns ominously about "nuclear weapons in the hands of apocalyptic mullahs publicly pledged to Israel's annihilation."

The allusion is to an illusion, the alleged threat by Iranian President Ahmadinejad to "wipe Israel off the map." But he never said that, an inconvenient reality reluctantly acknowledged by Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor early last month. And in January, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and his Israeli counterpart both publicly affirmed the unanimous assessment of U.S. intelligence that Iran is not working on a nuclear weapon.

Who, then, is being apocalyptic? Krauthammer's agenda is so transparent that a rigorous Fact Check should be *de rigueur*.

Ray McGovern, Arlington

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served for 30 years as an Army and CIA intelligence analyst, and in January 2003 co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).
