

US Opened Doors After Vietnam War and Can Do So Again

People from Central America, as well as those displaced by wars in the Middle East, should get the kind of U.S. welcome that the military helped provide to refugees from Indochina in 1975, writes Ann Wright.

Exodus of 750,000 People

By Ann Wright



The thousands of people now trying to flee violence in Central America are small in number compared to those who were desperately trying to escape from Vietnam and other Indochina countries decades ago.

In the spring of 1975—with the U.S. either on the brink of pulling out of Vietnam, or already gone—over 131,000 South Vietnamese fled the country, some on the last planes out of Vietnam and other in flotillas of small boats. It was the beginning of a much larger exodus. All told, about 750,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos came to the United States between 1975 through 1986. They came under two resettlement initiatives established by Congress: the Refugee Parole Program and the Orderly Departure Program.

After the U.S. signed a peace agreement with North Vietnam, U.S. military ships that were still off South Vietnam began picking up hundreds of people each day who had left South Vietnam on small boats. The vast majority had been on the U.S.-backed Southern side of the war and feared reprisal by the new communist government from the North. At worst they could be killed and at the least forced into re-education

camps.

No equation of those refugees from the Vietnam War with people now and in recent years seeking refuge from widespread social instability in Central America—marked by gangs of drug cartels and linked to [decades of covert U.S. operations](#)—can be exact. But today's refugees from [Honduras](#), [Guatemala](#) and [El Salvador](#), along with the millions of people displaced by [U.S.-backed military interventions in Iraq](#) and elsewhere in the Middle East, deserve comparable consideration, given the U.S. role in disrupting their lives.

Instead, President Donald Trump is turning a [hostile face](#) on Central American migrants and refugees—by [separating children from parents](#), by insisting on building a wall, by having people rounded up. Longstanding concerns about the conditions inside the U.S. detention centers were renewed by the Washington Post report of a [7-year-old girl dying of dehydration](#).

The U.S. has also shown indifference to refugees from Iraq and Syria by barely opening its doors. Admission numbers were already paltry under the Obama administration, when the U.S. was only allowing [tens of thousands of refugees](#) a year. Now, under Trump, 2018 is on track to [hit a 40-year low](#), finds Global Citizen in an analysis of U.S. State Department data. More than 5 million Syrians are registered refugees, with Turkey hosting the highest number, followed by Lebanon and Jordan, according to [December data from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees](#). More than [6 million Syrians](#) have had to seek refuge inside their own country.

In a cruel backtracking of U.S. commitments, the Trump administration is once again signaling its intention to deport Vietnamese immigrants who 40 years ago fled retaliation and have lived in the United States for four decades, according to a Dec. 12 report by [The Atlantic](#). Those targeted for deportation have committed crimes in the U.S. but were still protected by a 2008 bilateral agreement between Vietnam and the U.S. assuring that Vietnamese citizens would not be subject to return if they arrived before July 12, 1995, the year diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States were resumed after the war. [John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran and former U.S. secretary of state, called the move despicable on his Twitter account.](#)

Mobilizing for Newcomers

In 1975, the U.S. military mobilized to take care of newcomers while their paperwork was processed, after which the U.S. government sent them to communities all over the United States.

These measures were by no means a comprehensive attempt at redress. Many people seeking a way out of Vietnam were stranded. Some became part of the [huge wave of "boat people"](#) in 1979, who overwhelmed refugee settlements in Asian countries and caused an international crisis. But it is safe to say the U.S. demonstrated a far more humane response than it does today.

And in 1980, the U.S. once again welcomed people in distress when 125,000 Cubans arrived as a part of the [Mariel boat lift](#) during the Carter administration. Another 15,000 Haitians arrived on the shores of Florida by boat that same

year.

In 1975 I was one of thousands of U.S. military personnel who received the Vietnamese, first on military ships, later at military bases in the Philippines and then in Guam. Ultimately, I wound up volunteering at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, one of the five refugee camps set up in the continental United States. The others were at Camp Pendleton, California; Camp McCoy, Wisconsin; Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

At the time, I was attending law school at the University of Arkansas, 50 miles from the Fort Chaffee base and was in a U.S. Army Civil Affairs Reserve unit. The Army was notified on April 25, 1975, that the five military installations would be used and the Pentagon immediately sent out a call for reservists to help set up the military installations to receive and house up to 30,000 persons at a time.

The first refugees arrived at Fort Chaffee just seven days later, on May 2, on a plane carrying 70 people. Within 22 days, 25,812 refugees were at the base, making it the 11th-largest city in Arkansas. By June, 6,500 reservists had volunteered for active duty at Fort Chaffee.

At the peak of the airlift, as many as 17 flights a day landed at Fort Smith Municipal Airport with passengers bound for Fort Chaffee. All told, 415 refugee flights landed at the Fort Smith airport during the seven months that the base served as a refugee center. When the camp closed on Dec. 20, 1975, it had helped 50,809 people begin to regroup for life in the United States.

Fixing Up the Base

With the exception of annual two-week training cycles for the U.S. Army Reserve and Arkansas National Guard, Fort Chaffee had not been used since the mobilization for the Korean War. The majority of the sprawling barracks, built during World War II and the Korean War, had been shut for over 20 years. Units of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and medical units from Fort Sill, Oklahoma—the closest active-duty U.S. Army installation—arrived in late April 1975 to open up the facilities.

Animals were driven out of the buildings, toilet facilities re-opened. Some barracks were partially renovated for use by families. Giant “mess halls,” or military cafeterias were set up. A small hospital was cleaned and equipped, along with office spaces for refugee placement agencies.

Once the refugees had arrived, an array of hosting demands arose. U.S. Army doctors and nurses tended to people with medical needs. The Army’s kitchen staff began cooking huge caldrons of rice and vegetables and boiling water for tea. Mess halls fed 6,000 people three meals a day and were open around the clock.

Rice Incident

There was an incident over rice. The Vietnamese did not like the rice being served to them, which had been grown in the camp’s host state. It was a diplomatic challenge to inform former President Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, that we would have to get a different type of rice produced in another state because the Vietnamese refugees were not eating Arkansas rice. (That did not go over well in a state where most residents, including myself, didn’t

know there were different kinds of rice.)

Lots of babies arrived with mothers who were so severely stressed that they had trouble producing milk. Any infant formula would have to be lactose-free because in Vietnam cow milk was not used in formulas. One of my jobs was to make this arrangement. Companies cooperated very quickly, turning trucks around from their original destinations and sending them to the military bases and ramping up production for a new lactose-intolerant demographic in the country.

Resettlement was swift. Within two weeks, hundreds were leaving the camps as refugee organizations expertly found communities and groups all over the United States who poured out support, eager to sponsor families and individuals. Churches and civic groups found housing, equipped the houses and found jobs for the people who were arriving.

As the summer of 1975 drew to a close, any refugees who had not been resettled were consolidated in one camp at chilly Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. The U.S. Army general in charge of Fort Chaffee called me into his office and assigned me to procure winter clothing. We wound up finding clothing in the warehouses of the Armed Forces Post Exchange System, which were delivered in September.

All of these stories are to say that the U.S. government today could do far more to alleviate the refugee crisis than it is doing. There is still plenty of room in U.S. society and its land mass for people fleeing violence. All that's missing today is political will.

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was in U.S. embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to the lies the Bush administration was stating as the rationale for the invasion, occupation and destruction of Iraq. She is the co-author of “Dissent: Voices of Conscience.”

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The World Will Not Mourn the Decline of U.S. Hegemony

Commentators on both right and left bemoan the decline of American global power under Donald Trump, but is that such a bad thing? asks Paul Street in this commentary.

By Paul Street



There are good reasons to bemoan the presence of the childish, racist, sexist and ecocidal, right-wing plutocrat Donald Trump in the White House. One complaint about Trump that should be held at arm’s-length by anyone on the left, however, is the charge that Trump is contributing to the decline of U.S. global power—to the erosion of the United States’ superpower status and the emergence of a more multipolar world.

This criticism of Trump comes from different elite corners. Last October, the leading neoconservative foreign policy intellectual and former George W. Bush administration adviser Eliot Cohen [wrote an Atlantic magazine essay](#) titled “How Trump Is Ending the American Era.” Cohen recounted numerous ways in which Trump had reduced “America’s standing and ability to influence global affairs.” He worried that Trump’s presidency would leave “America’s position in the world stunted” and an “America lacking confidence” on the global stage.

But it isn’t just the right wing that writes and speaks in such terms about how Trump is contributing to the decline of U.S. hegemony. A [recent Time magazine](#)

reflection by the liberal commentator Karl Vick (who wrote in strongly supportive terms about the giant January 2017 Women's March against Trump) frets that that Trump's "America First" and authoritarian views have the world "looking for leadership elsewhere."

"Could this be it?" Vick asks. "Might the American Century actually clock out at just 72 years, from 1945 to 2017? No longer than Louis XIV ruled France? Only 36 months more than the Soviet Union lasted, after all that bother?"

I recently reviewed a manuscript on the rise of Trump written by a left-liberal American sociologist. Near the end of this forthcoming and mostly excellent and instructive volume, the author finds it "worrisome" that other nations see the U.S. "abdicating its role as the world's leading policeman" under Trump—and that, "given what we have seen so far from the [Trump] administration, U.S. hegemony appears to be on shakier ground than it has been in a long time."

I'll leave aside the matter of whether Trump is, in fact, speeding the decline of U.S. global power (he undoubtedly is) and how he's doing that, to focus instead on a very different question: What would be so awful about the end of "the American Era"—the seven-plus decades of U.S. global economic and related military supremacy between 1945 and the present? Why should the world mourn the "premature" end of the "American Century"?

What Would the Rest of the World Say?

It would be interesting to see a reliable opinion poll on how the politically cognizant portion of the 94 percent of humanity that lives outside the U.S. would feel about the end of U.S. global dominance. My guess is that Uncle Sam's weakening would be just fine with most Earth residents who pay attention to world events.

According to a global survey of 66,000 people conducted across 68 countries by the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WINMR) and Gallup International at the end of 2013, Earth's people see the United States as the leading threat to peace on the planet. The U.S. was voted top threat by a wide margin.

There is nothing surprising about that vote for anyone who honestly examines the history of "U.S. foreign affairs," to use a common elite euphemism for American imperialism. Still, by far and away world history's most extensive empire, the U.S. has at least 800 military bases spread across more than 80 foreign

countries and troops the military personnel about 60

foreign countries and territories." The U.S. accounts for more than 40 percent of the planet's military spending and has more than 5,500 strategic

nuclear weapons, enough to blow the world up 5 to 50 times over. Last year it increased its "defense" (military empire) spending, which was already three times higher than China's, and nine times higher than Russia's.



Think it's all in place to ensure peace and democracy the world over, in accord with the standard boilerplate rhetoric of U.S. presidents, diplomats and senators?

Do you know any other good jokes?

A Pentagon study released last summer laments the emergence of a planet on which the U.S. no longer controls events. Titled "At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-Primary World," the study warns that competing powers "seek a new distribution of power and authority commensurate with their emergence as legitimate rivals to U.S. dominance" in an increasingly multipolar world. China, Russia and smaller players like Iran and North Korea have dared to "engage," the Pentagon study reports, "in a deliberate program to demonstrate the limits of U.S. authority, reach influence and impact." What chutzpah! This is a problem, the report argues, because the endangered U.S.-managed world order was "favorable" to the interests of U.S. and allied U.S. states and U.S.-based transnational corporations.

Any serious efforts to redesign the international status quo so that it favors any other states or people is portrayed in the report as a threat to U.S. interests. To prevent any terrible drifts of the world system away from U.S. control, the report argues, the U.S. and its imperial partners (chiefly its European NATO partners) must maintain and expand "unimpeded access to the air, sea, space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum in order to underwrite their security and prosperity." The report recommends a significant expansion of U.S. military power. The U.S. must maintain "military advantage" over all other states and actors to "preserve maximum freedom of action" and thereby "allow U.S. decision-makers the opportunity to dictate or hold significant sway over outcomes in international disputes," with the "implied promise of unacceptable consequences" for those who defy U.S. wishes.

"America First" is an understatement here. The underlying premise is that Uncle Sam owns the world and reserves the right to bomb the hell out of anyone who

doesn't agree with that (to quote President George H.W. Bush after the first Gulf War in 1991: "What we say goes.")

Investment Not Democracy

It's nothing new. From the start, the "American Century" had nothing to do with advancing democracy. As numerous key U.S. planning documents reveal over and over, the goal of that policy was to maintain and, if necessary, install governments that "favor[ed] private investment of domestic and foreign capital, production for export, and the right to bring profits out of the country," according to Noam Chomsky. Given the United States' remarkable possession of half the world's capital after World War II, Washington elites had no doubt that U.S. investors and corporations would profit the most. Internally, the basic selfish national and imperial objectives were openly and candidly discussed. As the "liberal" and "dovish" imperialist, top State Department planner, and key Cold War architect George F. Kennan explained in "Policy Planning Study 23," a critical 1948 document:

We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. ... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. ... To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. ... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

The harsh necessity of abandoning "human rights" and other "sentimental" and "unreal objectives" was especially pressing in the global South, what used to be known as the Third World. Washington assigned the vast "undeveloped" periphery of the world capitalist system—Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the energy-rich and thus strategically hyper-significant Middle East—a less than flattering role. It was to "fulfill its major function as a source of raw materials and a market" (actual State Department language) for the great industrial (capitalist) nations (excluding socialist Russia and its satellites, and notwithstanding the recent epic racist-fascist rampages of industrial Germany and Japan). It was to be exploited both for the benefit of U.S. corporations/investors and for the reconstruction of Europe and Japan as prosperous U.S. trading and investment partners organized on capitalist principles and hostile to the Soviet bloc.

“Democracy” was fine as a slogan and benevolent, idealistic-sounding mission statement when it came to marketing this imperialist U.S. policy at home and abroad. Since most people in the “third” or “developing” world had no interest in neocolonial subordination to the rich nations and subscribed to what U.S. intelligence officials considered the heretical “idea that government has direct responsibility for the welfare of its people” (what U.S. planners called “communism”), Washington’s real-life commitment to popular governance abroad was strictly qualified, to say the least.

“Democracy” was suitable to the U.S. as long as its outcomes comported with the interests of U.S. investors/corporations and related U.S. geopolitical objectives. Democracy had to be abandoned, undermined and/or crushed when it threatened those investors/corporations and the broader imperatives of business rule to any significant degree. As President Richard Nixon’s coldblooded national security adviser Henry Kissinger explained in June 1970, three years before the U.S. sponsored a bloody fascist coup that overthrew Chile’s democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende: “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people.”

The U.S.-sponsored coup government that murdered Allende would kill tens of thousands of real and alleged leftists with Washington’s approval. The Yankee superpower sent some of its leading neoliberal economists and policy advisers to help the blood-soaked Pinochet regime turn Chile into a “free market” model and to help Chile write capitalist oligarchy into its national constitution.

“Since 1945, by deed and by example,” the great Australian author, commentator and filmmaker John Pilger wrote nearly nine years ago, “the U.S. has overthrown 50 governments, including democracies, crushed some 30 liberation movements and supported tyrannies from Egypt to Guatemala (see William Blum’s histories). Bombing is apple pie.” Along the way, Washington has crassly interfered in elections in dozens of “sovereign” nations, something curious to note in light of current liberal U.S. outrage over real or alleged Russian interference in “our” supposedly democratic electoral process in 2016. Uncle Sam also has bombed civilians in 30 countries, attempted to assassinate foreign leaders and deployed chemical and biological weapons.

If we “consider only Latin America since the 1950s,” writes the sociologist Howard Waitzkin:

[T]he United States has used direct military invasion or has supported military coups to overthrow elected governments in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Haiti, Grenada, and Panama. In addition, the United States

has intervened with military action to suppress revolutionary movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. More recently ... the United States has spent tax dollars to finance and help organize opposition groups and media in Honduras, Paraguay, and Brazil, leading to congressional impeachments of democratically elected presidents. Hillary Clinton presided over these efforts as Secretary of State in the Obama administration, which pursued the same pattern of destabilization in Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia.

Death Count: In the Millions

The death count resulting from “American Era” U.S. foreign policy runs well into the many millions, including possibly as many as 5 million Indochinese killed by Uncle Sam and his agents and allies between 1962 and 1975. The flat-out barbarism of the American war on Vietnam is widely documented on record. The infamous My Lai massacre of March 16, 1968, when U.S. Army soldiers slaughtered more than 350 unarmed civilians—including terrified women holding babies in their arms—in South Vietnam was no isolated incident in the U.S. “crucifixion of Southeast Asia” (Noam Chomsky’s phrase at the time). U.S. Army Col. Oran Henderson, who was charged with covering up the massacre, candidly told reporters that “every unit of brigade size has its My Lai hidden somewhere.”

It is difficult, sometimes, to wrap one’s mind around the extent of the savagery the U.S. has unleashed on the world to advance and maintain its global supremacy. In the early 1950s, the Harry Truman administration responded to an early challenge to U.S. power in Northern Korea with a practically genocidal three-year bombing campaign that was described in soul-numbing terms by the Washington Post years ago:

The bombing was long, leisurely and merciless, even by the assessment of America’s own leaders. ‘Over a period of three years or so, we killed off—what—20 percent of the population,’ Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, told the Office of Air Force History in 1984. Dean Rusk, a supporter of the war and later Secretary of State, said the United States bombed ‘everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another.’ After running low on urban targets, U.S. bombers destroyed hydroelectric and irrigation dams in the later stages of the war, flooding farmland and destroying crops ... [T]he U.S. dropped 635,000 tons of explosives on North Korea, including 32,557 tons of napalm, an incendiary liquid that can clear forested areas and cause devastating burns to human skin.

Gee, why does North Korea fear and hate us?

This ferocious bombardment, which killed 2 million or more civilians, began five years after Truman arch-criminally and unnecessarily ordered the atom bombing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to warn the Soviet Union to stay out of Japan and Western Europe.

Some benevolent "world policeman."

The ferocity of U.S. foreign policy in the "America Era" did not always require direct U.S. military intervention. Take Indonesia and Chile, for two examples from the "Golden Age" height of the "American Century." In Indonesia, the U.S.-backed dictator Suharto killed millions of his subjects, targeting communist sympathizers, ethnic Chinese and alleged leftists. A senior CIA operations officer in the 1960s later described Suharto's 1965-66 U.S.-assisted coup as s "the model operation" for the U.S.-backed coup that eliminated the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, seven years later. "The CIA forged a document purporting to reveal a leftist plot to murder Chilean military leaders," the officer wrote, "[just like] what happened in Indonesia in 1965."

As Pilger noted 10 years ago, "the U.S. embassy in Jakarta supplied Suharto with a 'zap list' of Indonesian Communist party members and crossed off the names when they were killed or captured. ... The deal was that Indonesia under Suharto would offer up what Richard Nixon had called 'the richest hoard of natural resources, the greatest prize in south-east Asia.' "

"No single American action in the period after 1945," wrote the historian Gabriel Kolko, "was as bloodthirsty as its role in Indonesia, for it tried to initiate [Suharto's] massacre."

Two years and three months after the Chilean coup, Suharto received a green light from Kissinger and the Gerald Ford White House to invade the small island nation of East Timor. With Washington's approval and backing, Indonesia carried out genocidal massacres and mass rapes and killed at least 100,000 of the island's residents.

Mideast Savagery

Among the countless episodes of mass-murderous U.S. savagery in the oil-rich Middle East over the last generation, few can match for the barbarous ferocity of the "Highway of Death," where the "global policeman's" forces massacred tens of thousands of surrendered Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait on Feb. 26 and 27, 1991. Journalist Joyce Chediac testified that:

U.S. planes trapped the long convoys by disabling vehicles in the front, and at the rear, and then pounded the resulting traffic jams for hours. 'It was like shooting fish in a barrel,' said one U.S. pilot. On the sixty miles of coastal highway, Iraqi military units sit in gruesome repose, scorched skeletons of vehicles and men alike, black and awful under the sun ... for 60 miles every vehicle was strafed or bombed, every windshield is shattered, every tank is burned, every truck is riddled with shell fragments. No survivors are known or likely. ... 'Even in Vietnam I didn't see anything like this. It's pathetic,' said Major Bob Nugent, an Army intelligence officer. ... U.S. pilots took whatever bombs happened to be close to the flight deck, from cluster bombs to 500-pound bombs. ... U.S. forces continued to drop bombs on the convoys until all humans were killed. So many jets swarmed over the inland road that it created an aerial traffic jam, and combat air controllers feared midair collisions. ... The victims were not offering resistance. ... [I]t was simply a one-sided massacre of tens of thousands of people who had no ability to fight back or defend.

The victims' crime was having been conscripted into an army controlled by a dictator perceived as a threat to U.S. control of Middle Eastern oil. President George H.W. Bush welcomed the so-called Persian Gulf War as an opportunity to demonstrate America's unrivaled power and new freedom of action in the post-Cold War world, where the Soviet Union could no longer deter Washington. Bush also heralded the "war" (really a one-sided imperial assault) as marking the end of the "Vietnam Syndrome," the reigning political culture's curious term for U.S. citizens' reluctance to commit U.S. troops to murderous imperial mayhem.

As Chomsky observed in 1992, reflecting on U.S. efforts to maximize suffering in Vietnam by blocking economic and humanitarian assistance to the nation it had devastated: "No degree of cruelty is too great for Washington sadists."

But Uncle Sam was only getting warmed up building his Iraqi body count in early 1991. Five years later, Bill Clinton's U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright told CBS News' Leslie Stahl that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children due to U.S.-led economic sanctions imposed after the first "Persian Gulf War" (a curious term for a one-sided U.S. assault) was a "price ... worth paying" for the advancement of inherently noble U.S. goals.

"The United States," Secretary Albright explained three years later, "is good. We try to do our best everywhere."

In the years following the collapse of the counter-hegemonic Soviet empire, however, American neoliberal intellectuals like Thomas Friedman—an advocate of the criminal U.S. bombing of Serbia—felt free to openly state that the real

purpose of U.S. foreign policy was to underwrite the profits of U.S.-centered global capitalism. "The hidden hand of the market," Friedman famously wrote in The New York Times Magazine in March 1999, as U.S. bombs and missiles exploded in Serbia, "will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

In a foreign policy speech Sen. Barack Obama gave to the Chicago Council of Global Affairs on the eve of announcing his candidacy for the U.S. presidency in the fall of 2006, Obama had the audacity to say the following in support of his claim that U.S. citizens supported "victory" in Iraq: "The American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They have seen their sons and daughters killed or wounded in the streets of Fallujah."

It was a spine-chilling selection of locales. In 2004, the ill-fated city was the site of colossal U.S. war atrocities, crimes including the indiscriminate murder of thousands of civilians, the targeting even of ambulances and hospitals, and the practical leveling of an entire city by the U.S. military in April and November. By one account, "Incoherent Empire," Michael Mann wrote:

The U.S. launched two bursts of ferocious assault on the city, in April and November of 2004 ... [using] devastating firepower from a distance which minimizes U.S. casualties. In April ... military commanders claimed to have precisely targeted ... insurgent forces, yet the local hospitals reported that many or most of the casualties were civilians, often women, children, and the elderly... [reflecting an] intention to kill civilians generally. ... In November ... [U.S.] aerial assault destroyed the only hospital in insurgent territory to ensure that this time no one would be able to document civilian casualties. U.S. forces then went through the city, virtually destroying it. Afterwards, Fallujah looked like the city of Grozny in Chechnya after Putin's Russian troops had razed it to the ground.

The "global policeman's" deployment of radioactive ordnance (depleted uranium) in Fallujah created an epidemic of infant mortality, birth defects, leukemia and cancer there.

'Bug-Splat'

Fallujah was just one especially graphic episode in a broader arch-criminal invasion that led to the premature deaths of at least 1 million Iraqi civilians and left Iraq as what Tom Engelhardt called "a disaster zone on a catastrophic scale hard to match in recent memory." It reflected the same callous mindset

behind the Pentagon's early computer program name for ordinary Iraqis certain to be killed in the 2003 invasion: "bug-splat." America's petro-imperial occupation led to the death of as many as one million Iraqi "bugs" (human beings). According to the respected journalist Nir Rosen in December 2007, "Iraq has been killed. ... [T]he American occupation has been more disastrous than that of the Mongols who sacked Baghdad in the thirteenth century."

As the Senate is poised to confirm an alleged torturer as CIA director it is important to remember that along with death in Iraq came ruthless and racist torture. In an essay titled "I Helped Create ISIS," Vincent Emanuele, a former U.S. Marine, recalled his enlistment in an operation that gave him nightmares more than a decade later:

I think about the hundreds of prisoners we took captive and tortured in makeshift detention facilities. ... I vividly remember the marines telling me about punching, slapping, kicking, elbowing, kneeling and head-butting Iraqis. I remember the tales of sexual torture: forcing Iraqi men to perform sexual acts on each other while marines held knives against their testicles, sometimes sodomizing them with batons. ... [T]hose of us in infantry units ... round[ed] up Iraqis during night raids, zip-tying their hands, black-bagging their heads and throwing them in the back of HUMVEEs and trucks while their wives and kids collapsed to their knees and wailed. ... Some of them would hold hands while marines would butt-stroke the prisoners in the face. ... [W]hen they were released, we would drive them from the FOB (Forward Operating Base) to the middle of the desert and release them several miles from their homes. ... After we cut their zip-ties and took the black bags off their heads, several of our more deranged marines would fire rounds from their AR-15s into their air or ground, scaring the recently released captives. Always for laughs. Most Iraqis would run, still crying from their long ordeal.

The award-winning journalist Seymour Hersh told the ACLU about the existence of classified Pentagon evidence files containing films of U.S.-"global policeman" soldiers sodomizing Iraqi boys in front of their mothers behind the walls of the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. "You haven't begun to see [all the] ... evil, horrible things done [by U.S. soldiers] to children of women prisoners, as the cameras run," Hersh told an audience in Chicago in the summer of 2014.

It isn't just Iraq where Washington has wreaked sheer mass murderous havoc in the Middle East, always a region of prime strategic significance to the U.S. thanks to its massive petroleum resources. In a recent Truthdig reflection on Syria, historian Dan Lazare reminds us that:

[Syrian President Assad's] Baathist crimes pale in comparison to those of the U.S., which since the 1970s has invested trillions in militarizing the Persian Gulf and arming the ultra-reactionary petro-monarchies that are now tearing the region apart. The U.S. has provided Saudi Arabia with crucial assistance in its war on Yemen, it has cheered on the Saudi blockade of Qatar, and it has stood by while the Saudis and United Arab Emirates send in troops to crush democratic protests in neighboring Bahrain. In Syria, Washington has worked hand in glove with Riyadh to organize and finance a Wahhabist holy war that has reduced a once thriving country to ruin.

Chomsky has called Barack Obama's targeted drone assassination program "the most extensive global terrorism campaign the world has yet seen." The program "officially is aimed at killing people who the administration believes might someday intend to harm the U.S. and killing anyone else who happens to be nearby." As Chomsky adds, "It is also a terrorism generating campaign—that is well understood by people in high places. When you murder somebody in a Yemen village, and maybe a couple of other people who are standing there, the chances are pretty high that others will want to take revenge."

The Last, Best Hope

"We lead the world," presidential candidate Obama explained, "in battling immediate evils and promoting the ultimate good. ... America is the last, best hope of earth."

Obama elaborated in his first inaugural address. "Our security," the president said, "emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint"—a fascinating commentary on Fallujah, Hiroshima, the U.S. crucifixion of Southeast Asia, the "Highway of Death" and more.

Within less than half a year of his inauguration and his lauded Cairo speech, Obama's rapidly accumulating record of atrocities in the Muslim world would include the bombing of the Afghan village of Bola Boluk. Ninety-three of the dead villagers torn apart by U.S. explosives in Bola Boluk were children. "In a phone call played on a loudspeaker on Wednesday to outraged members of the Afghan Parliament," *The New York Times* reported, "the governor of Farah Province ... said that as many as 130 civilians had been killed." According to one Afghan legislator and eyewitness, "the villagers bought two tractor trailers full of pieces of human bodies to his office to prove the casualties that had occurred. Everyone at the governor's cried, watching that shocking scene." The administration refused to issue an apology or to acknowledge the "global policeman's" responsibility.

By telling and sickening contrast, Obama had just offered a full apology and fired a White House official because that official had scared New Yorkers with an ill-advised Air Force One photo-shoot flyover of Manhattan that reminded people of 9/11. The disparity was extraordinary: Frightening New Yorkers led to a full presidential apology and the discharge of a White House staffer. Killing more than 100 Afghan civilians did not require any apology.

Reflecting on such atrocities the following December, an Afghan villager was moved to comment as follows: "Peace prize? He's a killer. ... Obama has only brought war to our country." The man spoke from the village of Armal, where a crowd of 100 gathered around the bodies of 12 people, one family from a single home. The 12 were killed, witnesses reported, by U.S. Special Forces during a late-night raid.

Obama was only warming up his "killer" powers. He would join with France and other NATO powers in the imperial decimation of Libya, which killed more than 25,000 civilians and unleashed mass carnage in North Africa. The U.S.-led assault on Libya was a disaster for black Africans and sparked the biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

Two years before the war on Libya, the Obama administration helped install a murderous right-wing coup regime in Honduras. Thousands of civilians and activists have been murdered by that regime.

The clumsy and stupid Trump has taken the imperial baton from the elegant and silver-tongued "imperial grandmaster" Obama, keeping the superpower's vast global military machine set on kill. As Newsweek reported last fall, in a news item that went far below the national news radar screen in the age of the endless insane Trump clown show:

According to research from the nonprofit monitoring group Airwars ... through the first seven months of the Trump administration, coalition air strikes have killed between 2,800 and 4,500 civilians. ... Researchers also point to another stunning trend—the 'frequent killing of entire families in likely coalition airstrikes.' In May, for example, such actions led to the deaths of at least 57 women and 52 children in Iraq and Syria. ... In Afghanistan, the U.N. reports a 67 percent increase in civilian deaths from U.S. airstrikes in the first six months of 2017 compared to the first half of 2016.

That Trump murders with less sophistication, outward moral restraint and credible claim to embody enlightened Western values and multilateral commitment than Obama did is perhaps preferable to some degree. It is better for empire to be exposed in its full and ugly nakedness, to speed its overdue demise.

The U.S. is not just the top menace only to peace on Earth. It is also the leading threat to personal privacy (as was made clearer than ever by the Edward Snowden revelations), to democracy (the U.S. funds and equips repressive regimes around the world) and to a livable global natural environment (thanks in no small part to its role as headquarters of global greenhouse gassing and petro-capitalist climate denial).

The world can be forgiven, perhaps, if it does not join Eliot Cohen and Karl Vick in bemoaning the end of the “American Era,” whatever Trump’s contribution to that decline, which was well underway before he entered the Oval Office.

Ordinary Americans, too, can find reasons to welcome the decline of the American empire. As Chomsky noted in the late 1960s: “The costs of empire are in general distributed over the society as a whole, while its profits revert to a few within.”

The Pentagon system functions as a great form of domestic corporate welfare for high-tech “defense” (empire) firms like Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Raytheon—this while it steals trillions of dollars that might otherwise meet social and environmental needs at home and abroad. It is a significant mode of upward wealth distribution within “the homeland.”

The biggest costs have fallen on the many millions killed and maimed by the U.S. military and allied and proxy forces in the last seven decades and before. The victims include the many U.S. military veterans who have killed themselves, many of them haunted by their own participation in sadistic attacks and torture on defenseless people at the distant command of sociopathic imperial masters determined to enforce U.S. hegemony by any and all means deemed necessary.

This article originally appeared on TruthDig.

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From Chaos in Saigon, to Chaos in Washington: 4/4/68

ABC News correspondent Don North left the violence of Vietnam on April 3, 1968 to arrive the next day in Washington, gripped by the violent reaction to the

assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Don North *Special to Consortium News*

Since the Tet offensive of January 1968 the mean streets of Saigon reeked of smoke, tear gas and incoming rocket and mortar fire. I had been a correspondent for ABC TV News for the past two years and it was with great relief that I was re-assigned to Washington D.C. in early April.

As I looked back at the skyline of Saigon, a Scotch & Soda in hand as my plane took off, I could see black smoke rising from one part of the city, and white smoke trailing fires set off elsewhere by the Viet Cong. A day later, on Thursday, April 4, as my flight descended into Washington, I could see black smoke rising from one part of the city and white smoke rising from another.

As news of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis spread, despondent crowds gathered in the heart of Washington's business section along 14th street. Orderly at first, the crowds became surly and started breaking windows, looting stores and setting fires.

I reported immediately to the ABC News bureau on Connecticut Ave. The news editor said, "Good timing Don, we can use a reporter with combat experience. There's a crew leaving for the riots in a few minutes. There's room in the car for you."

The Same Smell of Teargas

Cruising down 14th Street the air was the same as in Saigon: filled with smoke and the smell of tear gas. A light rain was falling. Slick streets were littered with broken glass and bricks. Stretches of 14th and 7th and H looked like combat zones. Hundreds of blazes set by arsonists would leave wreckage and desolation. We were seeing the beginning of the reaction to the assassination that would beset Washington for the next 72 hours and leave sections of the city in ruins for over 30 years.

Local businesses were being vandalized, windows smashed and merchandise carried off. We pulled up to a liquor store where looters were walking out through smashed windows carrying armloads of booze. We discreetly filmed with an Auricon sound camera through a side window. The looters didn't seem to notice.

Suddenly an angry man rushed at our car with a large brick in his hands and started pounding on a side window. It didn't break as we sped out of his reach.

The riots apparently began nearby with a brick thrown through the window of the

Peoples Drug Store at 14th Street and U. Dr. King had died at 8 P.M. Though he had ardently preached non-violence, by 10 P.M. large crowds gathered to vent anger, sadness and frustration that was justified, even if the violence wasn't. Teenagers walked with transistor radios tuned to the news. Many local stations played hymns between newscasts.

Ben's Chili Bowl near the Peoples Drug Store was not targeted by looters and managed to stay open through the night. Stokely Carmichael, a member of the Black Panthers, made the Chili Bowl his headquarters and he led a group of youths into nearby stores demanding they close in respect for Dr. King's death. Carmichael had been a follower of King but had recently become independent. I tried to interview him but he was moving too fast.

But in the weeks following the riots I would often sit down with Carmichael, as he became a nationally known voice against the war I had left behind in Saigon. That night, he urged the crowds to stay calm, but their anger was too great.

The looters soon turned to arson and threw Molotov cocktails into buildings and rocks and bricks at firefighters who tried to put out the blazes. Many African-American store owners sprayed "SOUL" on their windows to be spared.

The D.C. fire department reported 1,180 fires between March 30 and April 14. Property loss caused by the disturbances was extensive. 1,190 buildings, including 283 homes were badly damaged or destroyed an estimated loss at \$25 million. Mostly white residents, fearful of the violence, accelerated their departure for suburban areas.

By Friday, April 5, the unrest spread to other sections of the District, especially 7th Street NW, H St and parts of Anacostia. Joining the 3,000 strong D.C. police force, Federal troops and the National Guard were called in and would reach 11,000 in numbers. U.S. Marines mounted machine guns on the steps of the Capitol and Army troops from the 3rd Infantry guarded the White

House . Federal troops now occupied



In three days of upheaval, 13 people were killed, two by police officers. Riots that week in Newark caused 27 deaths and 43 were killed in Detroit.

A 5:30 PM curfew was enforced in the District. D.C. Commissioner Walter Washington, later to become Washington's first black Mayor, made nightly appearances during the unrest, and helped to stem the violence. He had rebuffed FBI suggestions that police shoot rioters and looters on the spot.

The military occupation of Washington was the largest of any American city since the Civil War and raised questions about whether it was legal, as the use of federal troops for law enforcement had been banned by the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878.

Killed on the First Anniversary of His Vietnam Speech

Had the Johnson administration heeded King's words about the state of America and its war in Southeast Asia, perhaps the violence I had left behind in Saigon

and arrived to in downtown Washington may never have happened.

In his Riverside Church speech given on April 4, 1967, exactly one year before his assassination, King said:

Surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history.

As I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam, many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. At the heart of their concerns, this query has often loomed large and loud: "Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent?" "Peace and civil rights don't mix," they say. "Aren't you hurting the cause of your people?" they ask.

There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything on a society gone mad on war. And I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube.

So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such. Perhaps a more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

Don North, a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world, is the author of *Inappropriate Conduct*, the story of a WW II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he



uncovered.

The New CIA Director Nominee and the Massacre at My Lai

Protecting those who commit heinous crimes in the name of the U.S. government provides a dangerous precedent and could lead to the conclusion by many in the military and CIA that they can “get away with murder,” Ann Wright observes.

By Ann Wright

On March 16, 2018, the same day I was with a delegation from Veterans for Peace at the 50th annual ceremonies commemorating the deaths of 504 civilians who were murdered by U.S. Army soldiers over a period of four hours on March 16, 1968, in the hamlet of My Lai, Viet Nam and surrounding villages, President Donald Trump nominated Gina Haspel to be the new CIA Director.

That day therefore became a day of remembering murder and torture committed by members of the U.S. government a half-century ago—and much more recently in 2002.

We know what the U.S. Army soldiers did 50 years ago. In what is now called the My Lai massacre, U.S. soldiers executed 182 women including 17 pregnant women and raped many of them before they were killed. They murdered 173 children, 68 of whom were five years old or younger and they executed 89 middle aged persons and 60 persons over the age of 60, some of whom were burned alive, tortured, gang-raped, scalped and had their tongues cut out during the rampage of the U.S.

Army soldiers.

And we now know that Gina Haspel, President Trump's nominee for CIA director was the CIA senior officer in charge of a secret CIA prison in Thailand in 2002 in which prisoners were tortured – waterboarded (one person 82 times), kept in dog cages for weeks at a time, put into coffin boxes with things they were afraid of. To cover up her crimes, she ordered the destruction of the videotapes of the torture that happened in her prison.

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Army chain of command covered up the My Lai massacre and attempted to malign those who made the massacre public. Army veteran Ron Ridenhour described what had happened in letters to the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and others.

Helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson testified before Congress that he saw U.S. Army personnel killing Vietnamese civilians and landed his helicopter near the killing fields to end the rampage. He was told by the platoon leader Lieutenant William Calley to butt out, but instead Thompson picked up civilians running from the carnage and flew them to safety.

After several years of investigation, out of 26 men initially charged, Calley was the only person court-martialed and found guilty – of killing 22 villagers, and given a life sentence, but served only three and a half years under house arrest at Fort Bragg, NC and never spent one day in jail. President Nixon ultimately pardoned Calley.

Forty years later, in 2007, CIA whistleblower Jon Kiriakou revealed to the world that the CIA was waterboarding prisoners in secret and not-so-secret prisons in many parts of the world.

Kiriakou was imprisoned for almost two years for revealing that the CIA was torturing persons but none of those – including CIA director nominee Gina Haspel – who made torture a policy of the CIA or actually committed the acts of torture, including waterboarding, were ever charged with a crime.

The protection of those who commit heinous crimes in the name of the U.S. government (by the government in whose name the crimes are committed) provides a dangerous precedent and could lead to the conclusion by many in the military and CIA that they can “get away with murder.”

The sad history of our country is that murders and executions (remember the extrajudicial drone assassinations ordered by Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump) are acts that continue to be the policy of our country. These acts are known throughout the world, but seldom spoken about in the United States. That President Trump would nominate a known torturer to be the director of the CIA is

horrific. Her confirmation by the U.S. Congress would be a tragedy.

For what little credibility the U.S. left in the world, the Congress must refuse to confirm a known torturer as director of the CIA.

Ann Wright was in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves for 29 years and retired as a Colonel. She was also a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. government in March 2003 in opposition to Bush's war on Iraq and since then has been very active in anti-war and social justice issues. She is the co-author of "Dissent: Voices of Conscience."

Behind Colin Powell's Legend – My Lai

From the Archive: With media focus on the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War's My Lai massacre, Colin Powell's role as a military adviser has continued to elude scrutiny, so we're republishing a 1996 article by Robert Parry and Norman Solomon.

By Robert Parry and Norman Solomon (first published in 1996)

On March 16, 1968, a bloodied unit of the Americal division stormed into a hamlet known as My Lai 4. With military helicopters circling overhead, revenge-seeking American soldiers roused Vietnamese civilians – mostly old men, women and children – from their thatched huts and herded them into the village's irrigation ditches.

As the round-up continued, some Americans raped the girls. Then, under orders from junior officers on the ground, soldiers began emptying their M-16s into the terrified peasants. Some parents desperately used their bodies to try to shield their children from the bullets. Soldiers stepped among the corpses to finish off the wounded.

The slaughter raged for four hours. A total of 347 Vietnamese, including babies, died in the carnage that would stain the reputation of the U.S. Army. But there also were American heroes that day in My Lai. Some soldiers refused to obey the direct orders to kill.

A pilot named Hugh Clowers Thompson Jr. from Stone Mountain, Ga., was furious at the killings he saw happening on the ground. He landed his helicopter between

one group of fleeing civilians and American soldiers in pursuit. Thompson ordered his helicopter door gunner to shoot the Americans if they tried to harm the Vietnamese. After a tense confrontation, the soldiers backed off. Later, two of Thompson's men climbed into one ditch filled with corpses and pulled out a three-year-old boy whom they flew to safety.

A Pattern of Brutality

While a horrific example of a Vietnam war crime, the My Lai massacre was not unique. It fit a long pattern of indiscriminate violence against civilians that had marred U.S. participation in the Vietnam War from its earliest days when Americans acted primarily as advisers.

In 1963, Capt. Colin Powell was one of those advisers, serving a first tour with a South Vietnamese army unit. Powell's detachment sought to discourage support for the Viet Cong by torching villages throughout the A Shau Valley. While other U.S. advisers protested this countrywide strategy as brutal and counter-productive, Powell defended the "drain-the-sea" approach then – and continued that defense in his 1995 memoirs, *My American Journey*.

After his first one-year tour and a series of successful training assignments in the United States, Maj. Powell returned for his second Vietnam tour on July 27, 1968. This time, he was no longer a junior officer slogging through the jungle, but an up-and-coming staff officer assigned to the Americal division.

By late 1968, Powell had jumped over more senior officers into the important post of G-3, chief of operations for division commander, Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys, at Chu Lai. Powell had been "picked by Gen. Gettys over several lieutenant colonels for the G-3 job itself, making me the only major filling that role in Vietnam," Powell wrote in his memoirs.

But a test soon confronted Maj. Powell. A letter had been written by a young specialist fourth class named Tom Glen, who had served in an Americal mortar platoon and was nearing the end of his Army tour. In a letter to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam, Glen accused the Americal division of routine brutality against civilians. Glen's letter was forwarded to the Americal headquarters at Chu Lai where it landed on Maj. Powell's desk.

"The average GI's attitude toward and treatment of the Vietnamese people all too often is a complete denial of all our country is attempting to accomplish in the realm of human relations," Glen wrote. "Far beyond merely dismissing the Vietnamese as 'slopes' or 'gooks,' in both deed and thought, too many American soldiers seem to discount their very humanity; and with this attitude inflict upon the Vietnamese citizenry humiliations, both psychological and physical,

that can have only a debilitating effect upon efforts to unify the people in loyalty to the Saigon government, particularly when such acts are carried out at unit levels and thereby acquire the aspect of sanctioned policy.”

Glen’s letter contended that many Vietnamese were fleeing from Americans who “for mere pleasure, fire indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves.” Gratuitous cruelty was also being inflicted on Viet Cong suspects, Glen reported.

“Fired with an emotionalism that belies unconscionable hatred, and armed with a vocabulary consisting of ‘You VC,’ soldiers commonly ‘interrogate’ by means of torture that has been presented as the particular habit of the enemy. Severe beatings and torture at knife point are usual means of questioning captives or of convincing a suspect that he is, indeed, a Viet Cong...

“It would indeed be terrible to find it necessary to believe that an American soldier that harbors such racial intolerance and disregard for justice and human feeling is a prototype of all American national character; yet the frequency of such soldiers lends credulity to such beliefs. ... What has been outlined here I have seen not only in my own unit, but also in others we have worked with, and I fear it is universal. If this is indeed the case, it is a problem which cannot be overlooked, but can through a more firm implementation of the codes of MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) and the Geneva Conventions, perhaps be eradicated.”

Glen’s letter echoed some of the complaints voiced by early advisers, such as Col. John Paul Vann, who protested the self-defeating strategy of treating Vietnamese civilians as the enemy. In 1995, when we questioned Glen about his letter, he said he had heard second-hand about the My Lai massacre, though he did not mention it specifically. The massacre was just one part of the abusive pattern that had become routine in the division, he said.

Maj. Powell’s Response

The letter’s troubling allegations were not well received at Americal headquarters. Maj. Powell undertook the assignment to review Glen’s letter, but did so without questioning Glen or assigning anyone else to talk with him. Powell simply accepted a claim from Glen’s superior officer that Glen was not close enough to the front lines to know what he was writing about, an assertion Glen denies.

After that cursory investigation, Powell drafted a response on Dec. 13, 1968. He admitted to no pattern of wrongdoing. Powell claimed that U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were taught to treat Vietnamese courteously and respectfully. The

Americal troops also had gone through an hour-long course on how to treat prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions, Powell noted.

“There may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs,” Powell wrote in 1968. But “this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the Division.” Indeed, Powell’s memo faulted Glen for not complaining earlier and for failing to be more specific in his letter.

Powell reported back exactly what his superiors wanted to hear. “In direct refutation of this [Glen’s] portrayal,” Powell concluded, “is the fact that relations between Americal soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent.”

Powell’s findings, of course, were false. But it would take another Americal hero, an infantryman named Ron Ridenhour, to piece together the truth about the atrocity at My Lai. After returning to the United States, Ridenhour interviewed Americal comrades who had participated in the massacre.

On his own, Ridenhour compiled this shocking information into a report and forwarded it to the Army inspector general. The IG’s office conducted an aggressive official investigation and the Army finally faced the horrible truth. Courts martial were held against officers and enlisted men implicated in the murder of the My Lai civilians.

But Powell’s peripheral role in the My Lai cover-up did not slow his climb up the Army’s ladder. Powell pleaded ignorance about the actual My Lai massacre, which pre-dated his arrival at the Americal. Glen’s letter disappeared into the National Archives – to be unearthed only years later by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sims for their book *Four Hours in My Lai*. In his best-selling memoirs, Powell did not mention his brush-off of Tom Glen’s complaint.

MAM Hunts

Powell did include, however, a troubling recollection that belied his 1968 official denial of Glen’s allegation that American soldiers “without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves.” After mentioning the My Lai massacre in *My American Journey*, Powell penned a partial justification of the Americal’s brutality. In a chilling passage, Powell explained the routine practice of murdering unarmed male Vietnamese.

“I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male,” Powell wrote. “If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen (West Germany), Lt. Col. Walter Pritchard,

was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong.”

While it’s certainly true that combat is brutal, mowing down unarmed civilians is not combat. It is, in fact, a war crime. Neither can the combat death of a fellow soldier be cited as an excuse to murder civilians. Disturbingly, that was precisely the rationalization that the My Lai killers cited in their own defense.

But returning home from Vietnam a second time in 1969, Powell had proved himself the consummate team player.

For more on Colin Powell’s real record, please [check out the “Behind Colin Powell’s Legend” series.](#)

Assault on the Embassy: The Tet Offensive Fifty Years Later

On January 31, 1968, Viet Cong forces attacked the U.S. Embassy in Saigon as part of the Tet Offensive, a turning point in the Vietnam War. On the eve of the 50th anniversary, veteran war correspondent Don North takes us back to that momentous event.

By Don North

It was the eve of battle. Ngo Van Giang, known as Captain Ba Den to the Viet Cong troops he led, had spent weeks smuggling arms and ammunition into Saigon under boxes of tomatoes. Ba Den was about to lead 15 sappers, a section of the J-9 Special Action Unit, against an unknown target. Only eight of the unit were actually trained experts in explosives. The other seven were clerks and cooks who signed up for the dangerous mission mainly to escape the rigors of life in their jungle camp near Dau Tieng, 30 miles northwest of Saigon.

On the morning of January 30, 1968, Ba Den secretly met with U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker’s chauffeur, Nguyen Van De, an embassy driver who was in fact an agent for the Viet Cong. De drove Ba Den in circles around the Embassy compound in an American station wagon. De revealed that Ba Den’s mission was to attack the heavily fortified Embassy. Learning the identity of his target, Ba Den was overwhelmed by the realization that he would probably not survive the attack. Pondering his likely death, and since it was the eve of Tet, Ba Den

wandered into the Saigon market, had a few Ba Muoi Ba beers and bought a string of firecrackers to light as he had done for every Tet celebration since he was a child.

Ba Den and his team were about to play a small but critical role in what we now call the Tet Offensive, the coordinated attack by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops against dozens of cities, towns and military bases across South Vietnam. When the bloody fighting ended after 24 days, the Communist troops had been driven from every target and the U.S. declared a military victory. However, the attackers scored a significant political and psychological victory by demonstrating an ability to launch devastating and coordinated attacks seemingly everywhere at once, and by showing that a U.S.-South Vietnamese victory was nowhere in sight. The attack on the U.S. Embassy was a potent symbol of that success.

I've thought a good deal about that attack on the Embassy over the last 50 years. I was there as a television journalist – lying in the gutter outside the Embassy as automatic fire buzzed above my head. Here is what I knew then and what I know now.

Later that night of January 30, Ba Den joined the other members of the assault team at 59 Phan Than Gian Street, the home of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Phe, a veteran Communist agent who ran an auto repair shop next to her home, just four blocks from the Embassy. The 15 sappers unpacked their weapons and dressed in black pajamas with a red sash around one arm. They had trained to breach the Embassy's outer perimeter with explosives and attack with rifle fire, satchel charges and rocket propelled grenades. They were ordered to kill anyone who resisted but to take prisoner anyone who surrendered.

The Embassy attack was to be the centerpiece of a larger Saigon offensive, backed up by 11 battalions totalling 4,000 Viet Cong troops. The operation's other five objectives were the Presidential Palace, the national broadcasting studios, South Vietnamese Naval Headquarters, Vietnamese General Staff Headquarters at Ton Son Nut Airbase, and the Philippine Embassy. The goal was to hold these objectives for 48 hours until other Viet Cong battalions could enter the city and relieve them. North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front leaders expected (or hoped) that a nationwide uprising to overthrow the government of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu would take place.

Of all the targets, the U.S. Embassy was perhaps the most important. The \$2.6 million compound had been completed just three months earlier. The six-story Chancery building loomed over Saigon like an impregnable fortress. It was a constant reminder of the American presence, prestige and power. Other key military and political targets were slated for attack in South Vietnam, like Nha

Trang, Buon Ma Thout and Bien Hoa, but most Americans couldn't even pronounce their names, let alone understand their importance. A successful attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, however, would instantly convey shock and horror on an American public already weary of the war, and could turn many of them against the war.

Public Relations Blitz

President Lyndon B. Johnson conducted a massive public relations blitz at the end of 1967 to convince Americans that the Vietnam War was nearing a conclusion. General William Westmoreland, the U.S. military commander in Vietnam, was ordered to support the President's progress campaign. In November 1967, Westmoreland told NBC's Meet the Press that the U.S. could win the war within two years. He then told the National Press Club, "We are making progress, the end begins to come into view." In his most memorable phrase, Westmoreland (derisively known as "Westy" to many members of the press corps) claimed to see "some light at the end of the tunnel."

The massive public relations campaign overwhelmed voices of other experienced American observers who foresaw disaster. General Edward Lansdale had been a senior American advisor to the South Vietnamese government starting in the mid-1950s; he was an expert on unconventional warfare and still senior advisor to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. In October 1967, Lansdale wrote to U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, "Hanoi policy makers saw the defeat of French forces in Vietnam as having reached its decisive point through anti-war sentiment in France than on the field of battle in Vietnam. [The battle of] Dien Bien Phu was fought to shape opinion in Paris, a bit of drama rather than sound military strategy."

Lansdale warned that Hanoi was about to follow a similar plan to "bleed Americans" because it believed the American public was vulnerable to psychological manipulation in 1968. It was an accurate prediction; despite Lansdale's inability to exert influence on policy at that time, he had a better grasp on what was happening in Vietnam than Westmoreland or Bunker – or President Johnson.

Detoured to Khe Sanh

As an ABC News TV correspondent I was sent to the U.S. base at Khe Sanh, located in the northwest corner of South Vietnam, in the weeks before Tet. The base had been under siege by Communist forces and General Westmoreland was predicting a major offensive there, where the Communists would seek to repeat the French military loss at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Since 1968, a majority of U.S. military analysts have suggested the enemy attacks at Khe Sanh were part of a ruse to

draw American military forces away from South Vietnam's population centers, leaving them open to successful attacks at Tet. Khe Sanh became a metaphor for Westmoreland's mismanagement of the war.

My cameraman and I were covering the ongoing battle at Khe Sanh. A massive attack on January 30 sent us diving into a trench for protection from incoming mortars and rockets; the effort saved our lives but broke the lens of our camera. We were forced to return to Saigon for a replacement. I thought we would miss the expected military push on Khe Sanh but flying back to Saigon on the C-130 milk run, it seemed like all of South Vietnam was under attack. As we took off from Da Nang, enemy rockets fell on the runway. Flying south along the coast, we could see almost all the seaside enclaves under attack – Hoi An, Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay. It was a clear night, and as we passed over the besieged cities, we could see fires burning and hear on the military radio frequencies the calls of besieged U.S. troops.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army battle plan for the Tet Offensive called for coordinated surprise attacks throughout the country, but their plans were seriously compromised by a misunderstanding concerning the attack date. The Communist forces in the Northern provinces mistakenly planned the attack for January 30, whereas zero hour in the Southern provinces was understood to be January 31. As a result, I was in the unique position of watching the Tet Offensive unfold from the North to the South.

Convoy to the Embassy

At 2:30 AM, the Ba Den's sapper unit loaded into a taxi cab, a Peugeot truck and an Embassy car. Guiding them to the target was Nguyen Van De, the Embassy driver, a long-time employee who Embassy staff had nicknamed "Satchmo." Several of the sappers hid in his trunk. Driving with their lights out, the convoy approached the Embassy night gate on Mac Dinh Chi Street and fired their AK-47 assault rifles at two American sentries guarding the gate. Specialist 4 (SP4) Charles Daniel and Private First Class (PFC) William Sebast returned fire with their M-16 assault rifles, then ran through the steel gate and locked it. At 2:47 AM they transmitted "Signal 300" over the MP radio net to alert everyone that the Embassy was under attack. The sappers placed a 15 pound satchel charge against the eight foot high embassy wall, and the explosion created a hole three feet wide. The first two sappers crawled through the breach but were immediately killed by Daniel and Sebast's rifle fire.

Daniel shouted into his radio, "They're coming in! They're coming in! Help me! Help me!" as more sappers came through the hole. In an exchange of gunfire, both Daniel and Sebast were killed, the first two Americans killed in the battle for the Embassy.

The sappers made a concerted effort to break into the Chancery firing rocket propelled grenades through the heavy wooden doors and following up with hand grenades. Several U.S. Marines were wounded by shrapnel and fell behind the Chancery door. Few of the Marine or MP guards were armed with M-16's or other automatic weapons. One Marine fired a shotgun from the roof at the next wave of sappers entering through the hole in the wall. When the shotgun jammed, he continued to fire his .38 caliber revolver. Other American troops began to take up positions on nearby rooftops, giving them some control of the streets and the sappers inside the compound. Now trapped in the compound and being shot at from multiple directions, the attackers hunkered down behind large concrete flower pots on the Embassy lawn.

At about 3 AM, chief U.S. Embassy spokesman Barry Zorthian, at home a few blocks from the attack, started calling news bureaus; he had few details but told them the Embassy was under attack and there was heavy fire. ABC News bureau chief Dick Rosenbaum then called me around 3:30 and told me – just back from Khe Sanh – to find out what was happening. The ABC bureau, located at the Caravel Hotel, was only four blocks from the Embassy. We headed there in the ABC News jeep but did not get far. Just off Tu Do (now renamed Dong Khoi) Street, three blocks from the embassy somebody opened up on us with automatic weapons. It was impossible to tell who it was – Viet Cong, South Vietnamese Army, Saigon police, or U.S. MP's. A couple of rounds pinged off the hood of the jeep. I killed the jeep's lights and reversed out of range. We returned to the ABC News bureau to await dawn.

At 4:20 AM, Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) issued an order instructing the 716th Military Police Battalion to retake the compound. When the MP officer in charge arrived at the scene, he concluded that U.S. forces had the Embassy surrounded and the sappers trapped inside its walls. He was unwilling to risk lives of his men in a dangerous night assault against an enemy he knew could not escape, so he ordered his men to settle in and wait for morning.

At about 5:00 AM, a U.S. Army helicopter carrying reinforcements from the 101st Airborne Division attempted to land on the Chancery roof. As the chopper hovered before touching down, the surviving sappers opened fire. Afraid of being shot down, the helicopter chief aborted the mission and flew quickly away from the building. Lieutenant General Frederick Weyand, the Commander of III Corps (one of the four major military sectors designated by MACV), was monitoring the Embassy fight and agreed there was nothing to be gained by risking another night helicopter landing into a hot landing zone. He ordered a halt to air operations until daylight.

At first light, my cameraman and I walked to the Embassy. As we approached, I

heard heavy firing and saw green and red tracer bullets cut into the pink sky. Near the Embassy, we joined a group of U.S. MPs moving toward the Embassy front gate. I started my tape recorder for ABC Radio as the MPs loudly cursed the South Vietnamese troops for running away after the first shots. Lying flat in the gutter that morning with the MPs, we didn't know where the Viet Cong attackers were holed up or where the fire was coming from, but we knew it was the "big story."

Several MPs rushed past, one of them carrying a Viet Cong sapper piggy-back style. The sapper was wounded and bleeding. He wore black pajamas and, strangely, had an enormous red ruby ring on his finger. I interviewed the MPs and recorded their radio conversation with colleagues inside the Embassy gates. There was no doubt they believed the Viet Cong were in the Chancery building itself. Associated Press reporter Peter Arnett crawled off to find a phone and report the MPs' conversation to his office.

Just One Mag

Sporadic gunfire continued around the Embassy and one by one the sappers were either wounded or killed. I lay flat on the sidewalk in front of the Embassy as bullets ricocheted around. I found I was lying next to a seriously wounded sapper wearing black pajamas and a red arm band and bleeding from multiple wounds. Years later after reading declassified interrogation reports of the three prisoners, I discovered the wounded sapper lying next to me was Captain Nguyen Van Giang, alias Ba Den, who had lit firecrackers in the Saigon market the night before his mission and was one of the first through the hole blasted in the wall. Giang spent the remainder of the war as one of three prisoners of the Embassy attack in the infamous French-built prison on Con Dao Island just off the Southeast coast of South Vietnam.

Around 7:00 AM, Army assault helicopters land thirty-six heavily armed paratroopers from the 101st Airborne on the Embassy roof. The troopers quickly started to clear the building from top floor down searching each office for possible Viet Cong infiltrators. On the ground, MPs from the 716th stormed the front gate. My cameraman and I followed them onto the lawn which was littered with the bodies of dead and dying Viet Cong. I stepped over the Great Seal of the United States which had been blasted off the Embassy wall. We rushed into the once elegant Embassy garden where the battle had raged. It was, as UPI's Kate Webb later described, "like a butcher shop in Eden."

We paused to assess our film supply. "Okay, Peter how much film have we got left," I shouted to my cameraman. "I've got one mag," he replied. "How many do you have?" I had no mags left. "We're on the biggest story of the war with only one can of film," I groaned. "So it's one take of everything including my stand-

upper" – a TV reporter's closing remarks.

VC green tracer bullets still stitched the night sky as red tracers from the U.S. weapons arced down from the Embassy roof and from across the street. The MPs took three wounded sappers prisoner and marched them off for interrogation. Nguyen Van De, the Embassy driver who had aided the sappers, lay dead on the lawn along with another armed Embassy driver. Two other Embassy drivers died as well. Orders crackled over a field radio from an officer inside the Chancery. "This is Waco, roger. Can you get in the gate now? Take a force in there and clean out the Embassy, like now. There will be choppers on the roof and troops working down. Be careful not to hit our own people. Over."

Colonel "Jake" Jacobson, the CIA chief-of-station assigned to the Embassy occupied a small villa adjacent to the Embassy. He suddenly appeared at a window on the second floor. An MP threw him a gas mask and a .45 caliber Army pistol. Surviving sappers were believed to be on the first floor and would likely be driven upstairs by tear gas. The last VC still in action rushed up the stairs, firing blindly at Jacobson but missed. The colonel later told me, "We both saw each other at the same time. He missed me and I fired one shot at him point blank with the .45, taking him down." The battle was over.

At 9:15 AM, the U.S. officially declared the Embassy grounds secure. Scattered about the grounds were the bodies of 12 of the original 15 sappers, two armed Embassy drivers who were considered double agents and two drivers killed by accident. Five Americans were dead, including four Army soldiers: Charles Daniel, Owen Mebust, William Sebast, Jonnie Thomas; and one U.S. Marine, James Marshall.

Westmoreland Briefs

At 9:20 AM, General Westmoreland strode through the gate in his carefully starched fatigues, flanked by MPs and Marines who had been fighting since 3 AM. Standing in the rubble, Westmoreland held a briefing for the press. "No enemy got in the Embassy building. It's a relatively small incident. A group of sappers blew a hole in the wall and crawled in. They were all killed." He cautioned us, "Don't be deceived by this incident." Westmoreland's relentless optimism struck most of us reporters as surreal, even delusional. Most of us there had seen much of the fighting. The General was still spinning that everything was just fine. In the meantime, thousands of U.S. and South Vietnamese troops were fighting hard to take back the four other Saigon targets the VC had occupied – as well as the City of Hue and other targets of the offensive around the country.

Also, contrary to Westmoreland's briefing, it was not correct that all of the 15

sappers were killed. Three were wounded but survived. Army photographers Don Hirst and Edgar Price, and Life Magazine's Dick Swanson took dramatic photos of the wounded sappers being led away by 716th Battalion MPs, before being turned over to the South Vietnamese – and never heard from again during the war. No one admitted that some sappers survived, and it was a closely guarded secret that at least two of the dead Embassy drivers were Viet Cong agents.

The Embassy siege showed the effectiveness of U.S. Marines and Military Police, non-tactical troops fighting as infantry without benefit of heavy weapons or communication to overcome an enemy.

A TV Report Stand-Upper

Using our last 30 feet of film, I recorded my "stand-upper."

"Since the Lunar New Year, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have proved they are capable of bold and impressive military moves that Americans here never dreamed could be achieved," I said. "But whatever turn the war now takes, the capture of the U.S. Embassy here for almost seven hours is a psychological victory that will rally and inspire the Viet Cong."

A rush to judgement? Perhaps, but I was on an hourly deadline and ABC expected the story as well as some perspective, even in the early hours of the offensive – a first rough draft of history. Still my instant analysis never made it onto ABC News. Worried about editorializing on a sensitive story, a senior producer in New York killed the on-camera close. Ironically, my closer ended up in the Simon Grinberg library of ABC out-takes and was later discovered by director Peter Davis and used in his film "Hearts and Minds."

The rest of our story package fared better. The film from all three networks arrived on the same plane in Tokyo for processing and editing, causing a mad scramble to be the first film on the satellite for the evening newscasts in the U.S. Because we only had 400 feet to process and cut, ABC News made the satellite in time and the story led the evening news. NBC and CBS missed the satellite deadline and had to run catch-up specials later in the evening.

An Information Curtain Falls

Our group of 50 journalists in the Embassy compound were then escorted out and the gates were locked. An information curtain descended around the Embassy for the following weeks. No interviews were allowed with Marines or MP's who had fought the Embassy battle and won. Journalists were told the only comment on the Embassy battle would come from the State Department or White House, and that an investigation was under way and would be released in due course. That report – if there was ever such a report – has yet to be declassified. Without access to

the stories of the American defenders of the Embassy, their heroism went largely unreported, thus increasing the public perception that the Tet Offensive had been a U.S. defeat instead of the military victory it actually was.

In March 1968, just two months after Tet, a Harris poll showed that the majority of Americans, 60 percent, regarded the Tet Offensive as a defeat for U.S. objectives in Vietnam. The news media was widely blamed for creating the antiwar sentiment. Research by a senior U.S. officer in Vietnam, General Douglas Kinnard, found 91 percent of U.S. Army generals expressed negative feelings about TV news coverage. However, General Kinnard concluded that the importance of the media in swaying public opinion was largely a myth. That myth was important to the U.S. Government to perpetuate, so officials could insist it was not the real war situation to which Americans reacted, but rather the media portrayal of that situation.

Embassy Demolished, Memorials Remain

The imposing U.S. Embassy that withstood the attack fifty years ago was demolished in 1998 and replaced with a modest one story Consulate. In a garden closed to the public is a small plaque in honor of the five American soldiers who died defending the Embassy that day: Charles Daniel, James Marshall, Owen Mebust, William Sebast, and Jonnie Thomas. A few steps away, on the sidewalk outside the Consulate, is a gray and red marble monument engraved with the names of Viet Cong soldiers and agents who died there on January 31, 1968.

Three Surviving Sappers Imprisoned on Con Dao Island

The fate of the three surviving Viet Cong sappers was a closely held secret by the U.S. Embassy. Following a hot dispute between U.S. Army MPs and the South Vietnamese military as to who should have custody, the POWs were turned over to the South Vietnamese and imprisoned in the infamous old French prison on Con Dao island. U.S. Army interrogators questioned them and in 2002, the reports were declassified. If the three POWs were a fair indication of the 15 sappers who conducted the siege, it would seem they were not a highly trained elite force, but rather older soldiers of low rank, some holding down clerical and cooking duties for their units.

Ba Den, 43, was the senior survivor of the attack and among the first through the hole blown in the Embassy wall. He had been born in North Vietnam and migrated south to join a Viet Cong cadre in Tay Ninh.

A second sapper prisoner was Nguyen Van Sau, alias "Chuck," the third man through the wall hole. Shot in the face and buttocks, the 31 year-old Buddhist was captured by MPs at first light. Sau was born on a small farm near Cu Chi and

was forced to join the VC when a recruiting raid entered his village in 1964 and seized 20 men. Sau's main complaint was that he didn't get enough to eat but remained with the VC as most of the young men from his village were also members and had endured the same hardships. With information divulged by Sau, Saigon police raided the garage where the sappers mounted their attack and arrested the owner and ten others linked to the group.

The third sapper, 44 year-old Sergeant Dang Van Son, alias "Tot," joined the Viet Minh in North Vietnam in 1947 and was sent down the Ho Chi Minh trail. He became cook for an infantry company in Tay Ninh. During the attack, Son was wounded in the head and leg, captured by the South Vietnamese and woke up in a Saigon hospital several days later.

Ba Den was released from prison in 1975 and returned to his village North of Saigon. There was no word of Dang Van Son or Nguyen Van Sau, who are believed to have died in Con Dao prison and are buried in the vast cemetery there.

Biet Dong Committee of Ho Chi Minh City

Now that the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive and the Embassy attack is here, Vietnamese who honor the dead according to traditional custom will remember the estimated one hundred thousand Communist soldiers who died and renew their efforts to identify the burial grounds of their comrades. So it's surprising that even top North Vietnamese field commanders had little praise for the 15 sapper martyrs of the Embassy attack.

North Vietnamese General Tran Do, in communication with the Saigon command a few days after Tet, asked, "Why did those who planned the attack on the Embassy fail to consider the ease with which helicopters and troops could be landed on the roof?" However, their boldness and bravery against such overwhelming odds has made them heroes to be remembered in Vietnam. Although in recent years there has been U.S. cooperation in identifying burial grounds of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, there has been no recognition of a possible mass grave for the sappers killed at the Embassy.

Something Truly Stupid

Washington military analyst Anthony Cordesman has often observed, "One way to achieve decisive surprise in warfare is to do something truly stupid." As revealed in the interrogation reports of the sapper POWs, the planning and execution of the Embassy attack was "truly stupid" and carried out by poorly trained Viet Cong, but its effects marked a turning point of the war and earned a curious entry in the annals of military history.

Another Washington military analyst, Steven Metz, explains "counterinsurgency"

and why Tet became a dramatic turning point in the war. “The essence of insurgency is the psychological. It is armed theatre. You have protagonists on the stage, but they are sending messages to a wider audience. Insurgency is not won killing insurgents, not won by seizing territory; it is won by altering the psychological factors that are most relevant.”

In Vietnam, this “truly stupid” attack on the U.S. Embassy changed the course of the war. It may have been “a small incident” as General William Westmoreland claimed, but seen through the political and psychological prism of insurgency warfare, it may have indeed been the biggest incident of the war.

America’s Ready Supply of Enemies

The U.S. political process seems to rely on a steady supply of foreign “enemies” to hate, but sometimes politicians overcome hostilities and talk out differences, which remains the hope for the North Korean standoff, says Ann Wright.

By Ann Wright

Enemies of the United States come and go, but the longer they espouse revolutionary ideals and thus defy the United States, the longer they stay enemies. Eventually, U.S. officials try other strategies, such as engagement, to undermine or win over these adversaries.

Currently, the U.S. does not recognize/have diplomatic relations with only three countries—two built on revolutionary models that the U.S. doesn’t like, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the communist regime of North Korea – and Bhutan, a remote Asian kingdom in the Himalayan mountains that purposely isolates itself and has diplomatic relations with only India.

I’m on the way to visit a former U.S. enemy but now recognized diplomatically by the U.S.: Cuba. This trip will be my third in 18 months and the second since the U.S. reopened diplomatic relations with Cuba. The Obama administration took the big leap of talking with the “enemy” with its secret discussions with the Cuban government over a period of two years.

While discussions were proceeding, commercial businessmen and journalists provided the political cover for Obama to withstand the withering criticism from those who strongly opposed dealing with the Cuban government that has been in power since the Cuban revolution in 1959. The U.S. broke diplomatic relations

with the new Cuban government on Jan. 3, 1961, because of its nationalization of U.S. businesses in Cuba and its alliance with the Soviet Union.

On July 20, 2015, U.S.-Cuban relations were reestablished after 54 years. On March 20, 2016, President Obama visited Cuba, becoming the first U.S. President in 88 years to visit the island.

Yet, despite diplomatic relations, U.S. sanctions and restrictions remain on Cuban trade and commerce, based on the "Trading with the Enemy Act" and kept in place by strong political pressure from south Florida and its Cuban émigré population, much of which moved to Florida to escape the Cuban revolution. But the U.S. and Cuban decisions to dialogue showed that long broken diplomatic ties can be reestablished.

There was hope that the Obama administration would reach a similar accommodation with Iran after almost four decades of ruptured ties resulting from the seizure of the U.S. Embassy by Iranian militants on Nov. 4, 1979, and the holding of 52 U.S. diplomats for 444 days. But negotiations with the Iranian government to constrain the Iranian nuclear program in 2015 have not yet led to reestablishment of diplomatic relations.

Both the Obama and now Trump administrations have made clear that the U.S. will not talk about reestablishing diplomatic ties because of what Washington calls Iran's meddling in the affairs of its neighbors – Iraq, Syria and Yemen. For its part, Iran notes that the U.S. has invaded and occupied countries in Iran's neighborhood for over 16 years, Afghanistan and Iraq, and has launched military operations in other countries in the region, including Syria and Yemen.

Peoples Republic of China

During much of the Cold War, Washington refused to recognize the communist Chinese government that controlled the mainland in favor of defeated Nationalists who had fled to Taiwan. However, in July 1971, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made a secret trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC), followed by President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972.

The U.S. did not fully recognize the PRC until 30 years after its founding as a communist state because of the PRC's participation in the Korean War on the side of the North Koreans. Finally, on Jan. 1, 1979, during the Carter administration, the U.S. switched recognition from Taiwan to the PRC.

Russia

Interestingly, the United States never broke diplomatic relations with the communist government in the Soviet Union, from its founding in 1917 through the

tense days of the Cold War. After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1992, the U.S. shifted diplomatic relations to the Russian Federation. Even with the current high tensions with Russia, dialogue continues as does cooperation in certain areas. For example, the Russians' launch-and-return responsibilities of the international astronaut corps to the International Space Station have not been interrupted.

Vietnam

In the late 1950s, the United States embarked on its longest war at the time, 15 years of attempting to overthrow the communist government of North Vietnam and to maintain a pro-U.S. regime in South Vietnam. After the defeat of the Japanese in World War II, the United States supported France in trying to reestablish its colonial control of Vietnam. After France was defeated and Vietnam was partitioned, the United States blocked elections that likely would have reunified the country under communist Ho Chi Minh and eventually the U.S. committed half a million troops to the ensuing civil war. In 1975, however, the South Vietnamese government collapsed, dealing the U.S. a humiliating defeat.

It wasn't until 1995, 20 years later, when President Bill Clinton established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Vietnam. "Pete" Peterson, an Air Force pilot during the Vietnam War who spent over six years as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese army after his plane was shot down, became the first U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam. In January 2007, Congress approved Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for Vietnam.

North Korea

In the same region, the U.S. never diplomatically recognized the government of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) after World War II but instead set up its own compliant government in South Korea.

During the Korean War in the early 1950s, the strategy of the United States was to crush North Korea with a scorched-earth policy that leveled virtually every town and city. Though the hot war ended with an armistice in 1953, there was never a peace treaty, leaving North Koreans to face a huge U.S. military presence in South Korea while the U.S. assisted South Korea in building a powerful economy. While South Korea blossomed economically, North Korea had to divert its human and economic resources into defending its sovereign country from continuing threats of attack, invasion and regime change from the United States.

North Korea, however, did expand its diplomatic relations with most nations. At the start of the Cold War, North Korea only had diplomatic recognition from

other communist countries but it later established relations with developing countries and joined the Non-Aligned Movement. By 1976, North Korea was recognized by 93 countries and by August 2016 it was recognized by 164 countries. The United Kingdom established diplomatic relations with the DPRK in 2000 and Canada, Germany and New Zealand recognized North Korea in 2001. Today, the United States, France, Japan and Saudi Arabia are the only large states that do not have diplomatic relations with North Korea.

Under the new Trump administration, dialogue with the North Koreans has not been ruled out. However, as with the Bush and Obama administrations, the starting point for the U.S. for talks is still the North Korean government suspending or ending its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. Those demands are non-starters for the North Korean government without a peace treaty and while the U.S. continues annual military maneuvers with the South Korean military, threatening regime change in the North. The latest set of maneuvers was code-named "Decapitation."

The North Koreans are also aware what happened to Iraq and Libya after their leaders surrendered WMD stockpiles, a move followed by U.S.-backed invasions and the executions of the two countries' leaders.

North Korean leaders consider their nuclear program the only deterrent to another U.S. invasion. So, while under the most stringent international sanctions, North Korea has developed nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles and has placed satellites into orbit.

Thus, despite U.S. threats, U.S. leaders have to contemplate the potential destruction of South Korea and much of Japan if the U.S. launches a new war against the North. That is why the only rational hope for resolving the standoff is to finally negotiate a Korean peace treaty and make the North Koreans no longer terrified of another U.S. "regime change" war.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel. She was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the U.S. diplomatic corps in March 2003 in opposition to President Bush's war on Iraq. She is the co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.

Inside US Counterinsurgency

From the Archive: Stan Goff, the ex-U.S. Special Forces soldier who helped Pat Tillman's family expose the Army's cover-up of the former NFL star's friendly fire death in Afghanistan, wrote this story about his own military experience. It was published at Consortiumnews.com on Dec. 22, 1999.

By Stan Goff

Tolemaida is hot. The whole Sumapaz River Valley is hotter than hell.

Steep, semi-arid, plenty of thorns and mosquitoes, it's the perfect place for the Lancero School, where the Colombian military runs its toughest course of training and assessment. About 70 miles south of Bogota, Tolemaida is also home of Colombian Special Forces, kind of like the Fort Bragg of Colombia.

I'd been married for the second time for only 10 days on Oct. 22, 1992, when 7th Special Forces sent me there.

Bill Clinton was campaigning for the presidency against George H.W. Bush, and I remember the Delta guys who were billeted alongside us shrieking and carrying on when the election results came through showing Clinton's victory. "That faggot lovin' draft dodger! Shit!"

Delta was there training a select group of Colombian soldiers for "close-quarter battle," which means fighting inside buildings during hostage situations and the like. We were training two battalions of Colombian Special Forces in night helicopter operations and counterinsurgency tactics.

Of course, we were there helping the Colombian army to defend democracy against leftist guerrillas who were the foes of democracy. It mattered not that only a tiny fraction of the population had the means to recruit and promote candidates or that terror stalked the population.

I'm not being cynical. I'm just awake now. It took a couple of decades.

A Military Town

Growing up, I lived in a neighborhood where everyone worked in the same plant, McDonnell-Douglas, where F-4 Phantoms were built to provide close air support for the troops in Vietnam.

My dad and mom both riveted, working on the center fuselage assembly. I just understood that it was my duty to fight the godless collectivist menace of communism.

So, I joined the Army seven months after I squeaked through high school. In

1970, I volunteered for the airborne infantry and for Vietnam.

In the years that followed, I found out that I didn't know communism from cobblestones. All I saw in Vietnam was a race war being conducted by an invading army, and very poor people were taking the brunt of it.

I left the Army after my first hitch, but poverty coaxed me back in in 1977. Soon, I had stepped onto the slippery slope of a military career. I didn't like garrison soldiering, but I did like to travel.

So, it was inevitable that I ended up in Special Operations, first with the Rangers, later with Special Forces.

In 1980, I went to Panama. The fences there separated us from the "Zonies" – the slum dwellers who lived in the Canal Zone. After that, I went to El Salvador, Guatemala and a host of other dirt-poor countries.

Over and over, the fact that we as a nation seemed to take sides with the rich against the poor started to penetrate – first my preconceptions, then my rationalizations, and finally, my consciousness.

Now I am the Viet Cong.

1983: The former Special Forces guy posing as a political officer didn't even try to hide his real job at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala.

"You with the political section?" I asked. I knew what he did. I was trying to be discreet.

"I'm a fuckin' CIA agent," he responded.

The CIA man had adopted me out of friendship for a mutual acquaintance, one of my work associates with whom he had served in Vietnam. The CIA man told me where to get the best steak, the best *ceviche*, the best music, the best martinis. He liked martinis.

We stopped off one afternoon at the El Jaguar Bar in the lobby of the El Camino Hotel, a mile up Avenida de la Reforma from the U.S. Embassy. He drank eight martinis in the first hour.

The CIA man began spontaneously relating how he had participated in the execution of a successful ambush "up north," two weeks earlier.

"North" was in the Indian areas: Quiche and Peten, where government troops were waging a scorched-earth campaign against Mayans considered sympathetic to leftist guerrillas.

He was elated. "Best fuckin' thing I got to do since Nam."

"You're talkin' kinda loud," I reminded him, thinking this must be pretty sensitive stuff.

"Fuck them!" he shot a circumferential glare. "We own this motherfucker!"

The other patrons looked down at their table tops. The CIA man was big and manifestly drunk.

I should have known better, but I mentioned a Mayan schoolteacher who had just been assassinated by the *esquadrones de muertos*. It had been in the newspapers. The teacher had worked for the Agency for International Development.

My point was that it made the United States look bad, when these loose cannons pulled stunts like that. The impression was left that the U.S. government tacitly approved of assassinations by continuing to support Guatemala's government.

"He was a communist," stated the CIA man, without even pausing to toss down his dozenth martini. His eyes were getting that weird, stony, not-quite-synchronized look.

So that's how it was. I never thought to thank him for peeling that next layer of innocence off my eyes.

I had to take the CIA man's car keys from him that night. He wanted to drive to some whorehouse in Zone 1.

When we left the bar, he couldn't find his car in the parking lot, so he pulled his pistol on the attendant and threatened to shoot him on the spot. He accused the attendant of being part of a car theft gang.

"I know these motherfuckers," he glared. The attendant was almost in tears, when I wrested the pistol from my colleague's hand.

We proceeded to find his car in the lot one block away. That's when he started talking about driving to his favorite bordello.

"Gimme the keys!" he bellowed, as I danced away from him.

"I can't."

"I'll kick your ass," he said.

I reached into my pocket and grabbed three coins. When he lunged at me again, I tossed the coins into a street drain with a conspicuous jingle.

"There's the keys," I said.

He peered myopically into the drain for a moment, then tried to train his eyes on me. I dodged his staggering assault like he was a child. He almost fell, and I found myself wondering how I could possibly carry him.

He turned abruptly, like he'd just forgotten something, and tottered quietly away. I dropped his keys off at the political section the next day, with a note explaining where his car was.

Odd Characters

Fred Chapin was the U.S. ambassador in Guatemala. He was famous for his ability to drink a bottle of Scotch and still give a lucid interview in fluent Spanish, before his bodyguards carried him up to his room at la residencia and poured him into bed.

Chapin was credited with a well-known quote in Foreign Service circles: "I only regret that I have but one liver to give for my country."

Embassies are collections of these idiosyncratic characters.

Mauricio, another one of these exotic individuals, was the chief Guatemalan investigator assigned to work with the Security Section at the embassy.

Dissipated to a fault, even the thugs on the bodyguard details gave him a wide berth. His reputation as a sadistic former death squad member was well known.

His history was on him, like an aura of impersonal decay. He made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. "If you need to find something out, just send Mauricio" was the provincial wisdom at Security.

Langhorne Motley, Reagan's special ambassador to Central America, came to Guatemala to see what was being done with U.S. money, other than aboriginal genocide and the elimination of Bolshevik school teachers, of course.

I was assigned as a member of his security for a trip to Nebaj, a tiny Indian hamlet near the Mexican border. We were going to inspect a hospital.

There were no roads into Nebaj, so a helicopter was coordinated. When we finally arrived in Nebaj, the pilot and crew chief were in an animated conversation, both referring again and again to the fuel gauge.

Out of the helicopter, we were escorted through the dirt streets to an open-bed 2 1/2-ton truck by a corpulent, European-looking Guatemalan lieutenant colonel. The villagers stood in silence as we passed.

Two small children, maybe three years old, burst into hysterical tears when I walked too near them with my CAR-15 assault rifle. I tried not to speculate about their reaction or its antecedents.

The truck took us to a dusty stone foundation. Nothing more. No rooms, no walls, no nothing. This was the hospital. Motley turned to me and said, "This is a fuckin' white elephant."

Later, the lieutenant colonel sat us in a room at his headquarters and trotted in two "former guerrillas." One was a skinny old man.

The other was a pregnant woman, around 25 years old.

They told us dutifully that they had been reformed by their new-found understanding of the duplicity of the communists and by the humanitarian treatment they had received at the hands of the soldiers.

It was a flat-eyed, canned recital, but it seemed to please the lieutenant colonel who sat there with a benevolent half-smile, glancing from them to us and back, judging their performance, assessing our reaction.

The skin of the two demonstration Indians almost moved from underneath with an arid, copper-tongued terror. The whole place smelled like murder to me.

Like murder.

1985: Reporters in El Salvador tended to hang out at the pool in the Camino Real Hotel, with transistor radios pressed to their ears.

I was chatting up a member of the press corps one day, having lunch at the Camino. Around 30, she worked for the *Chicago Tribune*.

She was just terribly excited because she had been allowed aboard a helicopter the week before, that flew into Morazan, a stronghold of leftist guerrillas. She got to see some bang-bang and was eternally grateful to the Embassy for arranging it for her.

Would I mind, she asked, taking her out for coffee or a drink somewhere in the barrios sometime? She would never think of doing it alone.

I was disillusioned. With her anemic weariness, she annihilated my concept of reporters as eccentric fearless old salts, obsessed with getting at the real story.

Bruce Hazelwood was a member of the Milgroup at the U.S. Embassy, like me a former member of the counter-terrorist unit at Fort Bragg. Hazelwood oversaw

training management in the Estado Mayor, army headquarters.

Over the past five years, Hazelwood had earned an enviable reputation as a productive liaison with the Salvadoran military. He told me off the cuff once that his biggest problem was getting the officers to quit stealing.

Good-looking, strawberry blonde, freckled, charming, Hazelwood also was a favorite of the young women with the press corps.

I went with him and an Embassy entourage to visit an orphanage at Sonsonate. The women from the press pool absolutely doted on him. He rewarded them with tons of mischievous magnetism.

Billy Zumwalt, also with the Milgroup, a fellow with Elvis-like looks, did the same thing at a party. The women from the press would skin up alongside him, asking how he thought progress was coming with the human rights situation. He would ask them how it seemed to them.

Well, they'd say, there were only a few battlefield executions of prisoners still taking place, according to rumors, but they'd heard nothing else. We can't expect them to come around overnight, now, can we?

Would you like to go dancing at an all night club later? You know where one is? I know where they all are, he'd tell them.

Zumwalt told me at a bar once that he was training the finest right-wing death squads in the world.

Privileged Sources

The reporters at the Camino Real hired Salvadoran rich kids as informants and factotums. It was very important that they be educated, English-speaking kids, 20 to 25 years old, who could keep the reporters abreast of rumors and happenings in the capital.

But the rich kids were as far from the lives of average Salvadorans as were most of the reporters.

In the street, I saw an old woman dragging herself down the sidewalk with a gangrenous leg, a crazy man shriveled in a corner, bone-skinny kids who played music for coins with a pipe and a stick.

On the bus one day in downtown San Salvador, a blind man came begging, and people who could ill afford it gave him a coin.

These people were callused, very modestly dressed, with Indian still in their

cheeks.

To the slick, manicured, round-eyed, well-to-do, the poor and the beggars were invisible, as invisible as the blackened carboneros, the worm-glutted market babies, the brooding teens with raggedy clothes, prominent ribs and red eyes glaring out of the spotty shade on street corners.

They have to be invisible so they can be ignored. They have to be sub-human so they can be killed.

I was reminded of the goats at the Special Forces Medical Lab. When I was training to be a medic, we used goats as "patient models."

The goats would be wounded for trauma training, shot for surgical training, and euthanized over time by the hundreds for each 14-week class.

Nearly every student upon arrival would begin expressing his antipathy for the caprine breed. "A goat is a dumb creature, hard-headed, homely," we'd say.

A few acknowledged what the program was actually doing without seeking these comfortable rationalizations. A few even became attached to the animals and grew more depressed with each day.

But most required the anti-caprine ideology to sustain their activity.

1991: As a member of 7th Special Forces, I went to Peru in 1991. The reasons we went there were manifold and layered, as are many of our rationales for military activity.

We were committed, as a matter of policy, to encouraging something called IDAD for Peru. That means Internal Development and Defense.

We were involved in a nominal partnership with Peru in the "war on drugs." Peru was in our "area of operational responsibility," and we (our "A" Detachment) were performing a DFT, meaning a Deployment for Training.

So, we went to Peru to assist in their internal development and defense, to improve their "counter-drug" capabilities, and to train ourselves to better train others in our "target language," Spanish.

Those were the official reasons. No briefing mentioned another part of the mission: unofficial wars on indigenous populations.

The course of training we developed for the Peruvians was basic counterinsurgency. Drugs were never discussed with the Peruvian officers. It was a sensitive issue – if you get my drift.

We were quartered in an ammunition factory outside the town of Huaichipa, for the first few weeks. Later, we moved into DIFE, the Peruvian Special Forces complex at the edge of Barranco district in Lima.

During the middle of the mission, we camped at the edge of an Indian village called Santiago de Tuna in the sierra four hours out of the capital.

Tuna is the Spanish word for prickly pear cactus fruit. Blessed with Cactus Fruit would be the direct translation. Local Indians did bring us two sacks full of cactus fruit, which was delicious and which kept everyone regular.

We became very chummy with the Peruvian officers, some of whom were easy-going fellows, and some of whom were aggressively macho. They stuffed us full of *anticuchos* (spicy, charbroiled beef heart) and beer every night.

Sometimes the combat veterans would get very drunk and spit all over us as they relived combat. One major couldn't shut up about how many people he had killed, and how the sierra was a land for real men.

A lot of drinking went on. Beer with the officers and soldiers. Cocktails in the bars; *pisco* with the Indians, who the soldiers tried to run off because they were considered a security risk.

One Indian man, in particular, toothless and dissipated, his blood-red eyes swimming with intoxication, astonished me with his knowledge of North American Indian history. He even knew the years of several key battles in our war of annihilation.

Geronimo was a great man, he said. A great medicine man. Great warrior. A lover of the land.

A Peruvian captain said a strange thing to me, as we walked past an Indian cemetery during the gut-check forced march out of Santiago de Tuna.

"Aqui hay los indios amigos." Here are the friendly Indians. He opened his hand toward the little acre of graves.

1992: When I was training Colombian Special Forces in Tolemaida in 1992, my team was there ostensibly to aid the counter-narcotics effort. We were giving military forces training in infantry counterinsurgency doctrine.

We knew perfectly well, as did the host-nation commanders, that narcotics was a flimsy cover story for beefing up the capacity of armed forces who had lost the confidence of the population through years of abuse. The army also had suffered humiliating setbacks in the field against the guerrillas.

But I was growing accustomed to the lies. They were the currency of our foreign policy. Drugs my ass!

1999: Drug czar Barry McCaffrey and Defense Secretary William Cohen are arguing for massive expansion of military aid to Colombia.

Already, Colombia is the third largest recipient of U. S. military aid in the world, jumping from \$85.7 million in 1997 to \$289 million last fiscal year. Press accounts say about 300 American military personnel and agents are in Colombia at any one time.

The Clinton administration was seeking \$1 billion over the next two years. The Republican-controlled Congress wants even more, \$1.5 billion, including 41 Blackhawk helicopters and a new intelligence center.

The State Department claims the widened assistance is needed to fight “an explosion of coca plantations.” The solution, according to the State Department, is a 950-man “counter-narcotics” battalion.

But the request is strangely coincident with the recent military advances of *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionario Colombiano* (FARC), the leftist guerrillas who already control 40 percent of the countryside.

In the United States, there is a different kind of preparation afoot: to prepare the American people for another round of intervention.

McCaffrey – not coincidentally the former commander of Southcom, the Theater Command for the U.S. armed forces in Latin America – is “admitting” that the lines between counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency are “beginning to blur” in Colombia.

The reason? The guerrillas are involved in drug trafficking, a ubiquitous claim that it is repeated uncritically in the press. There is no differentiation between the FARC and a handful of less significant groups, nor is there any apparent preoccupation with citing precise evidence.

When this construct first began to gain wide currency, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Miles Frechette pointed out that there was no clear evidence to support the claims. His statement was soon forgotten.

We were to be prepared.

Drug Barons

In Colombia, it is well known that those who profit the most from the drug trade are members of the armed forces, the police, government officials, and the “big

businessmen" of the urban centers.

The FARC taxes coca, a far cry from trafficking. The FARC also taxes gas, peanuts and furniture.

Coca also is the only crop left that keeps the *campesinos'* heads above water. The peasant who grows standard crops will have an average annual income of around \$250 a year. With coca, they can feed a family on \$2,000 a year. These are not robber barons. They are not getting rich.

Once the coca is processed, a kilo fetches about \$2,000 in Colombia. Precautions, payoffs and the first profits bring the price to \$5,500 a kilo by the time it reaches the first *gringo* handler.

The *gringo* sells that kilo, now ready for U.S. retail, for around \$20,000. On the street in the United States, that will break out to \$60,000. There are some high rollers at the end of the Colombian chain, but the real operators are the Americans.

Still, drugs can fill in for the World Communist Conspiracy only so far. Drugs alone won't justify this vast military build-up. For that, we also must believe we are defending democracy and protecting economic reform.

The rationales have become more sophisticated since I was in Guatemala in 1983, way more sophisticated than the blunt instrument of open war in Vietnam.

Democracy wasn't the goal then. We were stopping communists. Drugs are a great rationale, too. But with the FARC, we can have our drug war and our war against communists.

Yet, behind the democratic facade in Colombia are the most egregious and systematic human rights violations in this hemisphere.

Except in the 40 percent of the country where the FARC holds sway, right-wing paramilitaries, supported and coordinated by the official security forces, are involved in a process that would have made Roberto D'Abuisson or Lucas Garcia or Rios Montt proud: torture, public decapitations, massacres, rape-murder, destruction of land and livestock, forced dislocations.

Favored targets have been community and union leaders, political opponents, and their families.

This July, Commander of the Colombian Army, Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel intervened in the Colombian judicial process to protect the most powerful paramilitary chief in Colombia, Carlos Castano, from prosecution for a series of massacres.

Castano's organization is networked for intelligence and operations directly with the security forces.

That network was organized and trained in 1991, under the tutelage of the U.S. Defense Department and the CIA. This was accomplished under a Colombian military intelligence integration plan called Order 200-05/91.

The cozy relationship between the Colombian army and Castano raises another little problem for the drug-war rationale. Castano is a known drug lord. Not someone who taxes coca growers, but a drug lord.

There is also the U.S. government's troubling history of fighting with – not against – drug traffickers. Indeed, the CIA seems to have an irresistible affinity for drug lords.

The Tibetan contras trained by the CIA in the 1950's became the masters of the Golden Triangle heroin empires. In Vietnam and Cambodia, the CIA worked hand in glove with opium traffickers.

The contra war in Nicaragua was financed, in part, with drug profits. The CIA's Afghan-Pakistani axis employed in the war against the Soviets was permeated with drug traffickers. Most recently, there were the heroin traffickers of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

It might make more sense for McCaffrey to find \$1 billion dollars to declare war on the CIA.

Well-Oiled System

I was in Guatemala in 1983 for the last coup. In 1985, I was in El Salvador; 1991, Peru; 1992, Colombia.

People don't generally hear from retired Special Forces soldiers. But people need to hear the facts from someone who can't be called an effete liberal who never "served" his country.

A liberal will tell you the system isn't working properly. I will tell you that the system is working exactly the way it's supposed to.

As an insider on active duty in the armed forces, I saw the deep dissonance between the official explanations for our policies and our actual practices: the murder of schoolteachers and nuns by our surrogates; decimations; systematic rape; the cultivation of terror.

I have concluded that the billions in profit and interest to be made in Colombia and neighboring nations have much more to do with the itch for stability than

any concern about democracy or cocaine. After reflection on my two decades plus of service, I am convinced that I only served the richest one percent of my country.

In every country where I worked, poor people's poverty built and maintained the wealth of the rich. Sometimes directly, as labor; sometimes indirectly, when people made fortunes in the armed security business, which is needed wherever there is so much misery.

Often the companies that need protecting are American. Chiquita is a spiffed up version of United Fruit, the company that pressed the United States for the coup against Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954. Pepsi was there for Pinochet in Chile in 1973.

But the top interest now is financial. The United States is the dominant force in the dominant lending institutions of the world: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

What the United States exports, more than anything else, is credit. So the money is made from squeezing the interest out of those loans.

What that means in the Third World is that the economic elites borrow the money, with the government as their front, then bleed the population to pay the interest. That's done through higher more regressive taxes, by cutting social services, by selling off public assets, by co-opting or crushing labor unions, and so forth.

If the governments don't do enough, Washington pressures them to do more. At home, the American people are told that these countries need "structural adjustment" and "economic reform," when the reality is that U.S. foreign policy often is being conducted on behalf of loan sharks.

The big investors and the big lenders also are the big contributors to political campaigns in this country, for both Republicans and Democrats. The press, which is run by a handful of giant corporations, somberly repeats this rationale again and again, "economic reform and democracy."

Pretty soon, just to sound like we're not totally out of touch with current events, we catch ourselves saying, yeah ... Colombia, or Venezuela, or Russia, or Haiti, or South Africa, or whomever ... they need "economic-reform-and-democracy."

The Flag and the Dollar

Though phrased differently, this argument is not new. In 1935, two-time Medal of Honor winner, retired Gen. Smedley Butler, accused major New York investment

banks of using the U.S. Marines as “racketeers” and “gangsters” to exploit financially the peasants of Nicaragua.

Later, Butler stated: “The trouble is that when American dollars earn only six percent over here, they get restless and go overseas to get 100 percent. The flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow the flag.

“I wouldn’t go to war again as I have done to defend some lousy investment of the bankers. We should fight only for the defense of our home and the Bill of Rights. War for any other reason is simply a racket.

“There isn’t a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It had its ‘finger men’ to point out enemies, its ‘muscle men’ to destroy enemies, its ‘brain men’ to plan war preparations and a ‘Big Boss’-supernationalistic capitalism,” Butler continued.

“I spent 33 years and four months in active military service in the Marines. I helped make Tampico, Mexico, safe for the American oil interests in 1914; Cuba and Haiti safe for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue; helped purify Nicaragua for the International banking house of Baron Broches in 1909-1912; helped save the sugar interests in the Dominican Republic; and in China helped to see that Standard Oil went its way unmolested. War is a racket.”

Like Gen. Butler, I came to my conclusions through years of personal experience and through the gradual absorption of hard evidence that I saw all around me, not just in one country, but in country after country.

I am finally really serving my country, right now, telling you this. You do not want some things done in your name.

Stan Goff retired from the U.S. Army in February 1996 after serving in Vietnam, Guatemala, El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Honduras, Somalia and Haiti. He is featured in the 2010 documentary, “The Tillman Story,” about the cover-up of the friendly fire death of former NFL star Pat Tillman.
