

# GEORGE H.W. BUSH (1924-2018), AMERICAN WAR CRIMINAL

Intercepted

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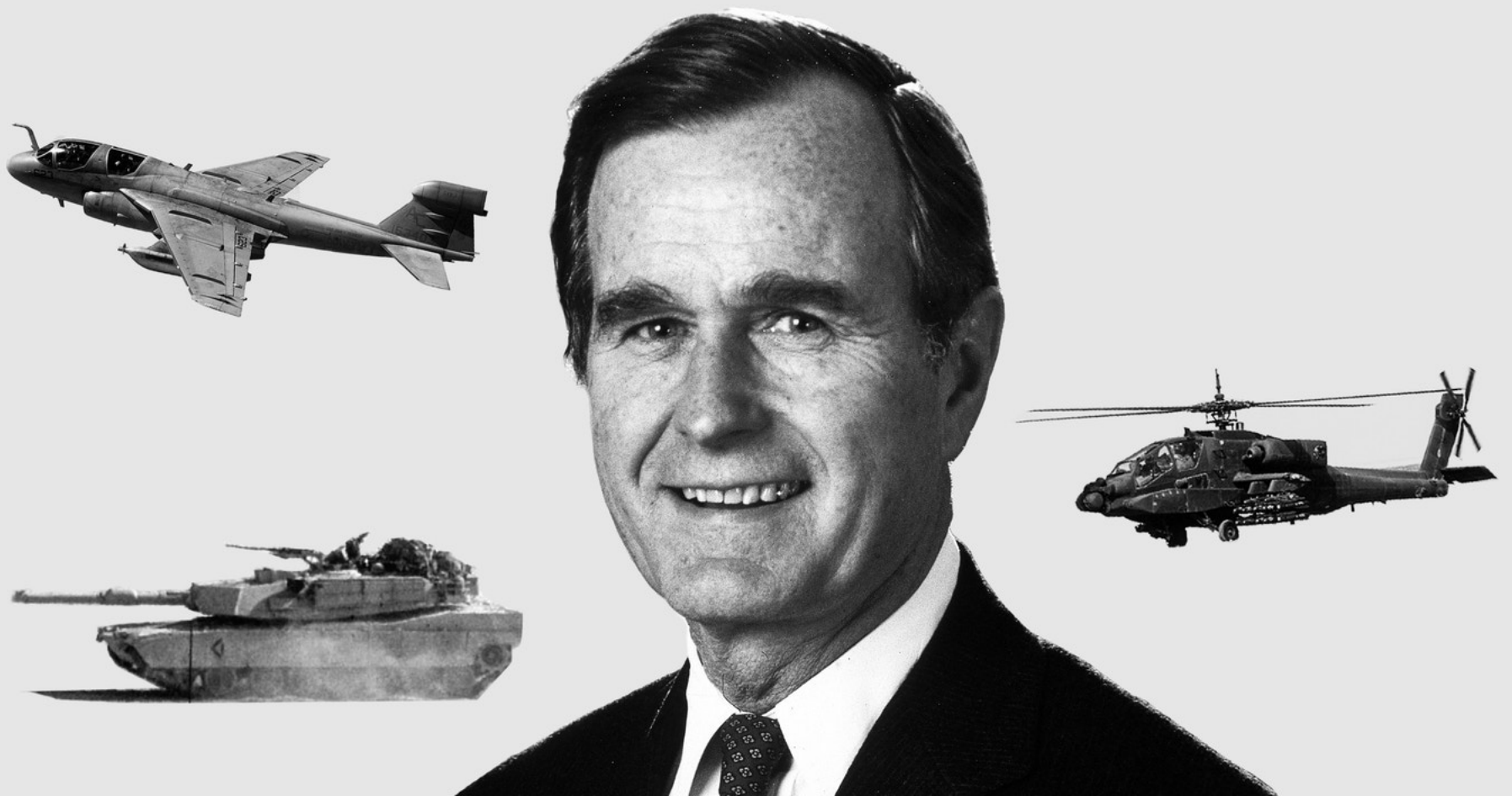


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# INTERCEPTED

WITH JEREMY SCAHILL

The Intercept

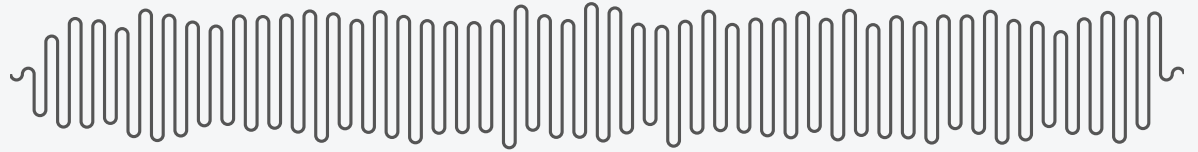


Intercepted with Jeremy Scahill

## George H. W. Bush, American War Criminal

An honest memorial service for an unrepentant warmonger.

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MEGAPHONE

The United States is now in the midst of a grotesque canonization of one of its imperial saints, George Herbert Walker Bush. This week on Intercepted: an honest memorial service for an unrepentant warmonger who dedicated his life to militarism, war, coups, regime change, and the lies of “American exceptionalism.” Jeremy Scahill details the crimes of Bush, the sick propaganda of the corporate media memorials, and the trail of blood, death, and tears Bush leaves behind. Independent journalist Arun Gupta covers decades of Bush, from his time at the helm of the CIA to the presidency. Gupta discusses Bush’s support for Manuel Noriega and his eventual invasion of Panama, the pardoning of Iran-Contra criminals, the dirty wars in Central America, the support for Saddam Hussein, and the launch of the Gulf War. Acclaimed Iraqi poet and scholar Sinan Antoon describes his life under the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Saddam, the horrors of the Gulf War, and how Bush’s destruction of Iraqi civilian society led to the rise of ISIS.

**Seann William Scott as Peppers:** She’s a beauty, ain’t she?

**Donald J. Trump:** What’s that all about?

**SWS:** That’s a tranquilizer gun. Hey, hey be careful with that. That’s the most powerful tranquilizer gun on the market.

**DJT:** Cool. Cool.

**SWS:** Yeah, it is cool. They say it could puncture the skin of a rhino from a hunt. Yes, that’s awesome.

**DJT:** What? What?

**SWS:** You just took one in the jugular, man.

**DJT:** Whoa.

**SWS:** Yes.

**DJT:** Oh my God. Oh my God. Look at this. Oh my God.

**SWS:** You should pull that out. That shit is not cool.

**DJT:** Wait, wait. What?

**SWS:** The dart, man. You got a fucking dart in your neck.

**DJT:** You are crazy. I like you. I feel tired.

[Simon and Garfunkel Sounds of Silence plays.]

**Melania Trump:** Mr. President? Be Best. Be Best. Be Best. Be Best. Be Best.

[Music interlude.]

**Jeremy Scahill:** This is Intercepted. I'm Jeremy Scahill coming to you from the offices of The Intercept in New York City. And this is episode 76 of Intercepted.

**Peter Alexander:** As the sun set over Washington Monday, President Bush's coffin arrived at the capitol. A hero's welcome heralded by cannons and a 21-gun salute.

**JS:** The national religion of the United States is American exceptionalism, and we are now in the midst of a grotesque canonization of one of its imperial saints: George Herbert Walker Bush. And right now, at this moment, every media outlet in this country, every politician, Democrat and Republican, is engaged in collective eulogy based on lies – lies about who Bush was, lies about his policies, lies about the mass-killing he oversaw during his life at the highest levels of power in the U.S. government.

George Herbert Walker Bush was an unrepentant war criminal who spent the overwhelming majority of his life making the world a worse place, a more dangerous place, and he leaves behind a global trail of tears, of bloodshed, of death and destruction. His legacy can be seen in the poverty and corruption of Central and Latin America. It can be seen in the never-ending killing fields of Iraq. It can be seen in the international criminals that he pardoned after Iran-Contra and the systematic violence of the so-called War on Drugs. This legacy can be seen in the scourge of AIDS, the presence of a sexual harasser, Clarence Thomas, on the Supreme Court who in a sick irony of history replaced Thurgood Marshall, the first black Supreme Court Justice, and a noble man. George Herbert Walker Bush came from a powerful family, was born with a silver spoon in his mouth to a father who cozied up to Nazis, who desecrated the grave of the indigenous leader Geronimo and whose businesses contributed to the imperial agenda to force the poor of the world into indentured servitude for the powerful. This is the eulogy that George Herbert Walker Bush should be receiving this week. Instead, we have this:

**Newscaster:** Throughout his long life, George Bush was admired as a man of decency, modesty, and uncommon achievement. Values that to the end, reflected what was most important to him, his family.

**George H.W. Bush:** I just want to get up into heaven and I don't get there by bragging on myself. My mother told me that years ago.

**Newscaster:** George Herbert Walker Bush today is being remembered as a great man and as a gentle soul.

**Newscaster:** The 41st president honored today not just as a statesman, but as a father and neighbor. The Houston Symphony paying tribute to his love of colorful socks.

**JS:** The U.S. and international news media are engaging in sick propaganda. Leave the stories about how classy Bush supposedly was, how cool his marriage was, how he built a father-son relationship with Bill Clinton, how he was nice to Barack Obama, how he always wore those funny socks – leave all of that to the family in

their private memorials. But for the rest of us, the rest of the world, we must remember that his incalculable crimes were committed in public, from the highest chambers of power, in the most dominant nation in the world. The accounting for his crimes should also be done in public. But no, we're told we have to have respect. We're told that it's not the time to discuss any of this. We're told that we must pretend that he was not a mass murderer with so much blood on his hands.

You know what? Donald Trump doesn't even have enough time left in his life to commit even a fraction of the international crimes that Bush carried out during his decades in power, whether it was at the helm of the CIA, or as vice-president, or as president. Not even close. Journalists today believe that they're so brave in calling out Trump's lies, in investigating his real estate deals, in probing his associates. And yet none of them have the spine to accurately describe the well-documented, indisputable crimes committed by George Herbert Walker Bush. What we're witnessing is a powerful media class and an elite political class whitewashing the life of a man who used his various positions not to make the world better, but to wage unthinkable wars, to undermine democratic movements, to kill innocent people, to orchestrate coups and invasions. And the reason this doesn't happen, that we don't talk about this, is because it's a sacrilege in the religion of American exceptionalism.

When an unarmed young black man is shot dead by the police, the media is often flooded with stories about how they were troubled kids, or they had criminal records, or they had used drugs, or they had run-ins with the law. The pictures used in these stories are often ones where these dead, black men are presented as thugs or scary. Journalists probed the life of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner. News organizations did everything in their power to smear these people in death with absolutely no regard for their families. No respect for their humanity. If George Herbert Walker Bush was treated the same way as these black men, it would take months of non-stop, 24/7 coverage to even begin to describe the tip of the iceberg of the unforgivable deeds that George Bush committed. Why? Because he committed his crimes as president of the United States and the nature of his crimes was imperial. He did it with bombs, and tanks, and invasions, and coups.

In watching the gross hagiography on display this week, I'm reminded of the quote from Voltaire: "It is forbidden to kill; therefore, all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets." That is who George Herbert Walker Bush was: a man who killed in large numbers to the sound of trumpets. And that's why all of these powerful news organizations, all of these Democrats and Republicans are engaging in willful lies, intentional whitewashing. It's sickening to watch all of this and to remember the countless lives that this man was responsible for ending across the globe.

[Memorial music plays.]

Can you imagine watching a memorial service for a warmonger leader of another nation? And if, instead of their vast crimes, we were bombarded with stories of their funny socks and their sense of humor? And how good of a husband or father they were? The pictures of their service dog next to a casket?

For Bush's victims across the world, that's their reality right now. That's their reality this week. The most powerful people in the United States are collectively pretending that none of it happened. You want to talk about disrespecting the dead? Let's talk about the more than 400 people that Bush incinerated in a Baghdad bomb shelter in February of 1991. How does this celebration of their murder and Bush's sense of humor and funny socks feel to their families? Bush dropped nearly 90,000 tons of bombs on Iraq. Tens of thousands of people were killed in that war and hundreds of thousands of civilians died from its effects. And let us remember the so-called Highway of Death when Bush authorized the mass slaughter of retreating Iraqi military units, bombing thousands of vehicles and killing untold numbers of soldiers in retreat out of Kuwait.

**Merrick Krause:** Our mission is to go up and stop the retreating forces as they left Kuwait City, and he said, "Put some hate in your heart and he'll be waiting here when we get back." When we took off, we'd expected to see convoys leaving Kuwait City, but we weren't prepared for the magnitude, the number of vehicles that were on the ground that we saw when we broke out under the clouds.

**JS:** We all know that George Herbert Walker Bush's son, George W. Bush, lied the

U.S. into the invasion and occupation of Iraq. But it was a lesson that he learned from his dad. In the build-up to the 1991 Gulf War, powerful American public relations firms orchestrated a campaign to convince the world that Iraqi soldiers had gone into Kuwaiti hospitals and killed babies in incubators and stabbed pregnant women. This campaign, based entirely on fiction, culminated with a bipartisan Congressional hearing supposedly on human rights. And it featured a young Kuwaiti girl who fought back tears as she claimed to have been a volunteer at a hospital in Kuwait where she witnessed these atrocities.

**Nayirah al-Sabah:** While I was there, I saw the Iraqi soldiers coming to the hospital with guns. They took the babies out of the incubators. Took the incubators and left the children to die on the cold floor. It was horrifying.

**JS:** What the American public was not told at the time of this Congressional hearing was that this girl was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States. The whole thing was orchestrated by these American PR firms, and this girl had witnessed none of these fake crimes. But the lies were repeated over and over as Bush made his case for war. These lies were also promoted by Representative Henry Hyde and other lawmakers on the floor of Congress.

**Henry Hyde:** Now is the time to check the aggression of this ruthless dictator whose troops have bayoneted pregnant women and have ripped babies from their incubators in Kuwait.

**JS:** President George Herbert Walker Bush used the false incubator story at least six times in public as he pushed for war against Iraq.

**GHWB:** And they had kids in incubators and they were thrown out of the incubators so that Kuwait could be systematically dismantled.

**JS:** Both U.S. wars against Iraq were based on lies and both were run by presidents named Bush. If you speak honestly about who George H.W. Bush really was, then you, by necessity, will be indicting the history, the politics, the legacy of the United States. If you speak honestly about Bush, then the myth of American exceptionalism is laid bare.

[Music interlude.]

# **Journalist Arun Gupta Discusses Bush's Invasion of Panama, Pardoning of Iran-Contra Criminals, The Dirty Wars in Central America, and The Launch of The Gulf War**

Today on the show, we're going to be offering a different kind of memorial for George Herbert Walker Bush – an honest one. Later in the show, we're going to be speaking with a renowned Iraqi poet, Sinan Antoon, who lived through both Saddam Hussein's regime and the 1991 Gulf War launched by Bush that destroyed Iraq's civilian infrastructure and made Saddam's grip on power even tighter. But first for an in-depth look at the crimes of George H.W. Bush, I'm joined by my friend and independent investigative journalist, Arun Gupta. His work has appeared in The Intercept, The Guardian, The Washington Post, and other publications. He was a longtime editor at the former Guardian Weekly and he's one of the founders of The Independent newspaper in New York City. Arun Gupta, welcome to Intercepted.

**Arun Gupta:** Thanks for having me on, Jeremy.

**JS:** Just start by giving a counter-brief eulogy for George H.W. Bush.

**AG:** I think the best way to describe George Herbert Walker Bush is that he was a ruthless master of international diplomacy, and he created the world that gave us a Donald Trump. He was one of the primary architects of it and if you really dig into his history and career, the amount of corruption, criminality, dirty dealings, covert operations, consorting with death squads, dictatorships, drug dealers puts Donald Trump to shame. And in fact, the Bush family is a criminal enterprise, you know. That's the way they should really be understood. We forget this because we obsess over one Trump tweet to the next. And that's not to say Donald Trump isn't a danger or there isn't all sorts of evidence piling up on criminality on his end,



but I think in some ways Bush was a greater danger because he was so good at using the levers of power around Iran-Contra, around Panama, around the Iraq war that he created kind of this international mess that Trump in part exploited in his rise to power.

**GHWB:** We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order. A world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations.

**JS:** Arun, of course, the tale of George H.W. Bush that's often told is that he enlisted in the Navy. He was the youngest fighter pilot ever in the Navy.

**Campaign Ad:** The story of George Bush is a success story. He was both an outstanding college athlete and a brilliant student. He served his country with valor. A combat carrier pilot, he was awarded the distinguished flying cross and three air medals. Today, he serves his industry, his community, and his party.

**JS:** And he sort of made it on his own, in politics, running for Congress, and then becoming U.N. Ambassador and CIA director, vice president, ultimately president. But let's back up and talk about what is actually a political dynasty in the United States – the Bush family and Prescott Bush. Give some context to who George Herbert Walker Bush's father, Prescott, was and a little bit about the family.

**AG:** Both sides of the family. So, it's George Herbert Walker, you know his wife Dorothy Walker came from wealth, whereas Prescott Bush also came from wealth. This is a family whose income starts to become vast in the late 19th century. It's through steel and coal. They were hooked up with Standard Oil. Then, by the time you get to the early 20th century, Prescott Bush had become a financier.

So there's nothing self-made about George Bush Sr. just like there's nothing self-made about Donald Trump. He's constantly trading off his family connections and wealth. And one of the really interesting parts – and listeners can find this in a couple of great books like “American Dynasty” by Kevin Phillips or “Family of Secrets” by Russ Baker – is it looks like Bush Sr. by the late 1950s had hooked up with the CIA. And this is the real story that he is someone who is in the spook

business and this comes up time and again. And it really reaches its fruition in the 1980s where he is part of this whole vast secret government that's being run out of the Reagan Administration and engaging in just all these heinous policies that are completely being kept from the public and are violating all sorts of U.S. laws. So, his public image is very different from the reality of his political career.

**JS:** And we're going to get to those dirty wars of the 1980s and ultimately, the 1991 Gulf War. But before we do that, Arun, Prescott Bush one of the things that we know about him is that when he was a member of the Skull and Bones society at Yale, he snuck onto the Beef Creek Apache Prisoner-of-War Cemetery in 1918. And he was there to desecrate the grave of the indigenous leader and warrior Geronimo. But also he was very close to Nazism and the Nazi ideology and figures who would go on to take over Germany under the reign of Adolf Hitler.

**AG:** During the 1930s, his firm was doing a lot of funding for Thyssen, which is this large conglomerate in Germany that's also involved in the steel and coal industry there. And of course, what is the rearmament program depending on, right? It's depending on all this metal and steel for building the tanks, building the planes, the ships.

**Newscaster:** We present these pictures of Germany's new army in a ray of Nuremberg because it's important that the public should have an opportunity of gauging the extent of German rearmament. Yes, Germany rearmed is again a big military factor in the world.

**AG:** And while there was nothing technically illegal at least under U.S. law – of course, Hitler is secretly arming in violation to the Armistice treaty and the League of Nations – he continues this even after the U.S. formally enters World War II into 1942. And finally the U.S. Treasury ceases some of his assets, and that's worth thinking about, that Prescott Bush is arming the Nazis into 1942. A former Nazi war crime prosecutors said that Prescott Bush should have been prosecuted for aiding and abetting the enemy. And about a decade ago two former slave laborers at Auschwitz unsuccessfully tried to sue the Bush family because their slave labor was benefiting ultimately the Bush family. Because they were working for the Thyssen Corporation benefiting from the death camp labor and then in turn,

Prescott Bush did.

**JS:** Arun, you mentioned George H.W. Bush starting his life in the shadows working with the CIA in the 1950s. But of course, you know in all of the eulogies, it's mentioned that he was a former CIA director, but he was only director of the Central Intelligence Agency for less than a year over the course of 1976 to 1977. Take us back to the beginning of the relationship between George H.W. Bush and the CIA and what we know about it.

**AG:** So, George Bush joined Skull and Bones Society. This is considered a fertile recruitment ground, these secret societies for the CIA. You know, it's a "club" at Yale. At that point, going to an Ivy League institution like that, it's these exclusively young, wealthy, white men. There were quotas on Jews at this time. And of course, virtually no blacks, Latinos, or people of other races. So in the 1950s, out of college, the Bush family was actually very close to the Dulles family. And Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles are really key architects of the Cold War under Dwight D. Eisenhower. Allen Dulles is at the head of the CIA.

**Allen Dulles:** There are times when the United States government feels that the developments in another government is of a nature to imperil the safety and the security, and the peace of the world and asks the Central Intelligence Agency to be its agent in that particular situation.

**AG:** So George Bush Sr. ends up going into the oil business. He starts his company called the Zapata Corporation.

**GHWB:** After college, I returned to Odessa and Midland where in the framework of the free enterprise system, I helped to build two strong businesses in the oil industry.

**AG:** In the late 1950s, they move one of their oil rigs close to Cuba. This is around the time that Castro came to power evicting the U.S-backed dictator Batista. And the CIA reportedly, what they were doing was they were using the Zapata offshore oil corporation to train Cuban exiles and that they would give these list of names to George Bush to hire to work on the platform. And from this platform, they

would train them and they would conduct raids on their homeland.

But he's traveling all over the world. He's going to South America. He's going to, visiting Gulf States. He's going to Borneo. These are all oil-producing regions. But what he's also doing is making a lot of future contacts that would come into play in terms of this kind of whole worldwide cloak and dagger network.

**JS:** Now that all of this that you're describing was before he officially became CIA director, or he had even become a member of Congress. And just so people know he ran for Congress. He won his seat in Houston. He then tried to run for Senate.

**Campaign Ad:** George Bush. His home is Houston, Texas. He's a Republican candidate for the United States Senate. He will need your votes on May 2nd in order to win the Republican primary and he will need them again in November if he is to win the Senate seat now held by a liberal Democrat Ralph Yarborough.

**JS:** But he was defeated by Lloyd Bentsen and then Nixon pulled him back into official Washington. He was U.S. ambassador to the UN and then an envoy to China and ultimately becomes CIA Chief from 1976 to 1977.

**GHWB:** I'm going to approach this job with pride and they can give all the jokes they want on television about the CIA. It's vital to the national security of the United States.

**JS:** Talk about what was going on and what we know about his role as the CIA Chief during this period. The Vietnam War had just officially ended but the dirty wars in Central America were starting to heat up.

**AG:** So, actually first, Bush Sr. ran for Senate in 1964 and lost. And then two years later, he runs for Congress and wins. Within a year of him assuming office, he goes to Vietnam for a three-week trip and he's accompanied by a senior-level CIA official. And what's interesting about this trip in December '67, January 1968. This is a time that the Phoenix Program is being set up. And in fact, their notes from George Bush Sr. at this time where he talks about his interest in examining the Phoenix Program in Vietnam during this period. So, the Phoenix Program is really just one of the most heinous aspects of what the CIA did in the post-World War II

period. It's essentially a death squad program that they conducted in Vietnam.

**John Stockwell:** The Phoenix Program was created by the CIA and its purpose was to kill and terrorize. In Vietnam, I was forced to do business with a police chief who was a sadistic mutilator of prisoners. He liked to carve them up and throw the remains in the river and he was completely paid and propped up by the CIA. His whole career depended on one, controlling that operation so that the CIA needed him and two, the CIA propping him up and funding him.

**AG:** The idea was that they were going to do these counterterrorism operations. Fight terror with terror, is in essence what it was, that they wanted to break the back of the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong in South Vietnam by identifying Viet Cong fighters and collaborators, kidnapping them, extracting information, and disposing of them. And what that really meant is that they would abduct people. They would torture them in all sorts of brutal ways and then they would execute them. And low estimates 25,000 were killed. Other estimates are more than 50,000. Very few of them had anything to do with the resistance against the U.S. war. But what's crucial about this period is there are a number of figures in Vietnam who – we don't know if Bush met them at this point – who end up resurfacing at the CIA in 1976 where he becomes close to them. And then the same figures are absolutely central to the secret government running the Iran-Contra operation during the 1980s.

**JS:** Prior to the 1980s, while George H.W. Bush was the director of the CIA, he was also involved in a program that became known as Operation Condor. Talk about that program and what it was and Bush's role.

**AG:** Operation Condor was essentially [a] transnational, terrorism network that involved all these right-wing military dictatorships set up in Latin America often with the help of direct intervention in U.S. in countries like Argentina, Chile. And the various intelligence services decided that they wanted to go after dissidents who had fled the country. So, the U.S. really plays a central role in this. They're training these intelligence directors. They're funding them. They're giving them access to the most sophisticated U.S. communications networks and these governments, their secret police end up kidnapping and doing kind of the same thing as

they did in Vietnam.

They're kidnapping people. They're torturing them and they're disappearing them often in just the most brutal and appalling ways. This really surfaces during George Bush's tenure because in October of 1976, a CIA asset with the Chilean secret police basically plots and carries out the remote control car bombing of a Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and his American aide Ronnie Moffitt in the heart of Washington D.C.

**Richard Barnet:** The assassination of Orlando and the other Chilean exiles points directly to the responsibility of the Chilean military government. The Chilean Gestapo has participated in the murder of thousands of innocent persons, tortured thousands more and kept tens of thousands of political prisoners. Now, these same fruits have been visited on the city of Washington D.C.

**AG:** You got to understand just how crazy this is. That this is essentially the Jamal Khashoggi of its day, right? That you're engaged in this very flagrant and visible assassination in the heart of the U.S. Capitol. And what does George Bush do? He's director of CIA. He actually deliberately misleads the FBI as to who was behind this bombing. And this is something that happens again, and again during the 1980s and this is very relevant to what's going on with Trump. That Bush is actually engaged in deceiving not just the public but the law enforcement agencies who are tasked with bringing these people to justice. He's protecting the CIA assets within Chile and allowing them to carry out these deadly operations on U.S. soil and then preventing them from being brought to justice.

**JS:** And of course George H.W. Bush's tenure as CIA Chief again, less than a year, ends as Jimmy Carter becomes president. But then Bush after making his own run at the presidency ultimately ends up being the running mate for Ronald Reagan on the Republican ticket that ultimately would defeat Jimmy Carter. And of course, it's seldom talked about today, but it's so crucial to remember this history. Remind people of what happened on the eve of Ronald Reagan's election regarding Iran, the American hostages being held in the embassy, and Jimmy Carter.

**AG:** There's a lot of suspicion that there's this October surprise that goes on in

1980. And in 1979, Iran is in complete turmoil.

**Newscaster:** The streets of Tehran today, as many as 2 million people in one of the largest outpourings of anti-American sentiment ever seen.

**AG:** The seizure of the 52 members at the U.S. Embassy in 1979, this happens after Carter decides to let the Shah into the U.S. for cancer treatment and apparently it was under pressure from Henry Kissinger. They weren't going to let him in otherwise. There's long been suspicion that there was some sort of secret meeting with Bush involved where he struck a deal with the Iranians to release the hostages because the very moment that Ronald Reagan is inaugurated in January of 1981, a plane takes off with all the hostages from Tehran.

**Frank Reynolds:** Now day one. Day one of Ronald Reagan's presidency and day one of freedom for 52 Americans. Though thousands of miles apart these two historic events moved almost on parallel tracks today. The new president had not been an office an hour when the former hostages became free men and women again.

**AG:** The timing was incredibly suspicious. It has never been able to be definitively confirmed that Bush was involved in what's called this October surprise because there were all sorts of rumors that the hostages were going to be released. And that was one of the big factors why Carter lost because he was seen as weak and vacillating towards Iran.

**JS:** And this of course, toward the end of Carter, beginning of Bush also begins this era of these dirty wars in Central America. I mean, obviously, the United States had had its hands totally dirty in the region, you know, forever but it really intensifies then after Bush and Reagan take the White House. And Nicaragua was one of the first targets because in 1979, the leftist Sandinistas officially take power. And then, the CIA with the full support and encouragement of the White House, as well as U.S. military Special Forces, start building up what Ronald Reagan would call Freedom Fighters but it was really a right-wing death squad known as the Contras.

**AG:** So in July 1979, the Sandinistas at a cost of about 50,000 dead, complete a revolution that had been going on for nearly a decade ousting the Somoza dictatorship which had been installed by the U.S. in the 1930s. Sandinistas come to power and there's also a revolution going on in El Salvador and a smaller one going on in Guatemala which the U.S. had also fomented a coup in 1954 against Jacobo Árbenz. These policies are all coming to a head by the late 1970s and early 1980s.

And so, the Reagan Administration from the start is really, wants to roll back the Sandinista revolution. We start to see this kind of counter-attack. The organizing of these death squads, a lot of these individuals who led the death squads were trained at the School of Americas, which is essentially a Pentagon terrorist training center in the United States, where thousands of Latin American military officers would be trained in the techniques of torture and murder over decades.

**JS:** The U.S. Army School of the Americas for a long time, it was based in Fort Benning, Georgia and among the "graduates" of the School of the Americas were, and during this time when Bush was in power, the people who assassinated Archbishop Óscar Romero, who has now been canonized and is a saint, shooting him as he said mass in San Salvador, murdered six Jesuit priests, and two women who worked with them, raped and murdered four Catholic nuns and killed tens of thousands of ordinary people, disappeared them, threw them out of helicopters. Just to put in clear perspective the kinds of people that were being trained by the United States during this era at the U.S. Army School of the Americas.

**AG:** Reagan and the Reagan Administration were hell-bent trying to oust the Sandinistas from power and to protect and support all these right-wing military dictatorships in Latin America. Like even before Reagan came to power, he wrote this column in the late 1970s defending the Argentinian generals who murdered, I believe, over 10,000 of their own citizens that they were bringing order and economic development to Argentina. Personnel from the Argentinian dirty war were recruited as some of the first trainers from the Contras.

Now, when we get to the scandal known as Iran-Contra – and here's what a lot of people don't know – the independent counsel at the time, a Republican, Lawrence Walsh is only looking from 1984 onwards. There's this whole period



from 1982 to 1984 that Iran-Contra never investigates because Iran-Contra was only charged starting with the violation of what's known as the Boland Amendment. This is [an] amendment that Congress passes in 1984 that makes it illegal for the CIA, the Pentagon, or any intelligence agency in the U.S. government to provide any direct or indirect or coordinate any aid to the Contras to oppose the Sandinistas.

But starting in 1982 the CIA chief who's kind of legendary William Casey works with Bush to coordinate a program to ship weapons to the Contras. And the key person who's carrying this out is Bush's National Security Advisor Donald Gregg who comes from The Phoenix Program who worked with Bush at the CIA in 1976. And Donald Gregg was actually a 31-year veteran of the CIA and to be able to be Bush's National Security Advisor, he had to resign from the CIA. So, this is just a cover operation. He goes from the CIA to Bush's office to carry out this secret war and there's just a huge amount of evidence that would actually come out about how this whole secret war and secret government is being run out of a George Bush's office.

And this is also where we start to see Manuel Noriega. He becomes the strong man in Panama by the late 1970s. He met George Bush when he was at the CIA in 1976. And Noriega is involved in letting the CIA use Panama to land the weapons in their airfields and then use Panamanian companies to cover all the transactions. And the thing about Iran-Contra is it just starts to get so insanely crazy. I mean, just what an absurd enterprise this is because Noriega starts to use the cargo flights to ship cocaine into the U.S. because he's working with the Medellín Cartel. And the CIA was aware of all this and they were turning a blind eye to it and Bush's office was aware of it as well because they were so obsessed with trying to oust the Sandinistas and their general anti-communist crusade. And you know, by 1992, after Bush loses reelection to Bill Clinton on Christmas Eve, a few weeks before he leaves office.

**Newscaster:** President Bush issued a written statement this Christmas Eve pardoning former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others for their involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal.

**Caspar Weinberger:** I want to express to the president my deep appreciation for his principal decision in granting this pardon and thereby correcting a terrible injustice that was being perpetrated on me.

**AG:** George Bush Sr. pardons his Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger who is set to go on trial and Lawrence Walsh was going to call George Bush as a witness in that trial. And Walsh was closing in on Bush and was looking to criminally prosecute him. There was this whole weapons for hostage deal that was going on in the mid-1980s as well and some of those proceeds would end up being used to fund the Contras. That was being coordinated by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. Lawrence Walsh makes clear that it looks like this is a criminal action, that it violates U.S. government policy, but also the Arms Control Export Act and he said that this went to the very top. He implicates Ronald Reagan by name, Bush, Schultz, Casey, Weinberger, the National Security Advisor, basically the whole cabinet. And they should have all been impeached.

**Reporter:** Mr. President, when you say your conscience is clear, do you mean that the interpretation that has been made of the documents in this trial, which I gather were made by Mr. [inaudible] are not entirely accurate.

**GHWB:** I'm not discussing anything about my role in this except to say that everything I've said I'll stand behind.

**Reporter:** You won't even, since they're sequestered –

**GHWB:** I've just told the gentleman that I'm not going to go into that. So, please don't ask me to do that, which I've just said I'm not going to do because you're burning up time. The meter is running.

**JS:** You look at how the issue of Trump and potential pardons of people like Paul Manafort or others and what they're accused of versus all of these people that were pardoned by the man now being hero-worshipped by every major Democrat, Republican etcetera. And there's no mention of the fact that we're talking about people who are engaged in illicit arms smuggling, narco-trafficking with supporting death squads, including death squads that murder American citizens. You also

– I think it's important to point this historical fact out – during the Iran-Contra investigations, Dick Cheney was a Congressman from Wyoming and he in fact, was one of the lead authors of the dissenting report on the Iran-Contra investigation. And in fact in his report, said that this was actually a model for how the U.S. should do its foreign policy, not some aberration or scandal. And then you have Cheney going on to be W's Vice President and you then see the same kind of death squad activity that became known in Iraq as the Salvador Option and included people like Colonel James Steele and other U.S. paramilitary figures that were deeply involved with creating death squads in Central America then doing it again in Iraq under George H.W. Bush's son's time in office with Dick Cheney, who was the main defense point on Iran-Contra for the Bush-Reagan White House.

**AG:** It's this whole continuity, you know, from The Phoenix Program to Operation Condor to the Central American dirty wars to the death squads in Iraq. And you have all these Bush Sr. figures who are running the war, right? Dick Cheney's Vice President. Donald Rumsfeld is Secretary of Defense.

**JS:** James Baker is the lawyer that comes in to ensure that the Supreme Court picks the right person in 2000 and George W. Bush is named president.

**AG:** Right, and you know, one of those votes is Clarence Thomas, basically this joke of a jurist who George Bush picked to replace the giant Thurgood Marshall. So, you just have this constant corruption that's going on with the Bush family. And now, they've been completely rehabilitated because they're not as crude or cartoonish as Donald Trump.

**JS:** You had this incident that happened on July 3rd, 1988 when the U.S. shot down an Iranian civilian airliner killing 290-odd passengers among the more than 60 children.

**William Crowe:** We believe that the cruiser USS Vincennes while actively engaged with threatening Iranian surface units and protecting itself from what was concluded to be a hostile aircraft, shot down an Iranian airliner over the straits of Hormuz. The U.S. government deeply regrets this incident.

**JS:** George H.W. Bush said the following in response to that shooting:

**GHWB:** I'll never apologize for the United States of America ever. I don't care what the facts are.

**AG:** Yeah, that was just a complete atrocity. You know, this is the war of the oil platforms that's going on in the Persian Gulf where U.S. Special Forces are blowing up Iranian oil platforms to help Iraq in it's a war against Iran. And the USS Vincennes is essentially parked right under commercial air traffic in the Persian Gulf and it shoots it down. And we've never heard the real story [of] what was going on there, but we know that may have been like a direct warning to the Iranians that the U.S. was going to keep getting more involved in the war if they didn't finally reach some sort of agreement with Saddam Hussein, who is being protected by the U.S.

We also haven't even gotten into the BCCI and B&L scandals. These were these huge banking scandals in the 1980s where billions of dollars were funneled in secret government credit from various agencies through these banks to Saddam Hussein. Over \$5 billion that allowed him to buy all this dual-use technology including the weapons and equipment to gas 5,000 Kurds at Halabja in 1988. And the Reagan Administration completely covered for and defended Saddam Hussein.

**JS:** Well, even more than that, Arun, from 1980 to 1988, we're talking about Bush's almost his entire duration as vice president under Reagan, the United States was supporting both Iran and Iraq militarily, intelligence-wise but clearly wanted Iraq to prevail in a decimation of both societies because Bush, Reagan, the CIA viewed Saddam as a secular murderous thug who could be used to implement the U.S. agenda in the region and far more preferential to the Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran.

**AG:** Exactly, and we see the same story in Panama as well where George Bush turns on his one-time buddy, Manuel Noriega, 1989 invading Panama and basically destroying this working-class neighborhood in Panama where Panamanian defense forces' main building was killing thousands. They created a mass grave, but this, of course, ends up paling in comparison to what happens in the Iraq war

with the destruction of Iraq civilian infrastructure. And by the end of 1992, a U.S. government official estimated something like 200,000 Iraqis died both directly from the war and as a result of the devastation of the civilian infrastructure, the electricity, the sanitation, clean water.

So, these are just not enormous crimes. They also set the stage for the chaotic world we see today. The Central American wars are exactly why we see these refugees are fleeing their countries by droves because we have destroyed these societies and people are just desperate to flee the violence and poverty because we would not let them have some sort of modicum of justice and dignity.

**JS:** How should honest people, people who care about history, and context, and facts remember George Herbert Walker Bush?

**AG:** George Herbert Walker Bush in some way is kind of this Nixonian figure on the political landscape because there was some progressive legislation that did pass, but it was part of this much broader heinous domestic policy stuff like Willie Horton, the complete hostility towards the AIDS crisis, and tens of thousands of gay men who were dying because of it. And it's wrapped in creating this chaotic world. And I think ultimately, George Herbert Walker Bush needs to be remembered as a doctor Frankenstein. He created the world. He was one of the primary architects of this world that gave us Donald Trump.

**JS:** Arun Gupta, thank you very much for being with us.

**AG:** Thanks for having me on.

**JS:** Arun Gupta is an investigative reporter whose work has appeared in The Washington Post, The Daily Beast, The Guardian, and The Intercept, as well as other publications. In addition to his journalism, Arun happens to be a graduate of the French Culinary Institute, and he's working on his first book, "Bacon as a Weapon of Mass Destruction: A Junk-Food-Loving Chef's Inquiry into Taste." You can follow Arun on Twitter @arunindy and support his work at Patreon where he is arunguptareporter.

[Music interlude.]

I began my life in journalism by begging my way into an unpaid apprenticeship with Amy Goodman, the host of Democracy Now! It was during the 1990s and Bill Clinton was President. Saddam Hussein was firmly entrenched in power as the dictator of Iraq, and that country was suffering in an unimaginable way. The 1991 Gulf War launched by President Bush had decimated Iraq's civilian infrastructure. A modern, Middle East nation had been bombed back decades. Water and sewage treatment facilities had been attacked systematically, cancer rates were skyrocketing and hospitals could not import basic medicines, analgesics, cancer treatment. That's because Bush followed up his destruction of Iraq by imposing what would become the most sweeping economic sanctions in history.

What that meant is that Iraq's civilian infrastructure was obliterated during the bombing and the war, and then it was prohibited from rebuilding the country or even offering the most basic medical care. When Bill Clinton defeated George H.W. Bush and won the presidency in 1992, one of his first acts as president was to bomb Iraq. The justification for that bombing was an alleged plot by Saddam Hussein to assassinate Bush on a visit to Kuwait. That turned out to be totally false but Bill Clinton's bombing killed several Iraqi civilians, including the famed painter Layla Al-Attar. Throughout the Clinton years, Iraq was bombed on average once every three days under the guise of the so-called no-fly zones. It was in this period that I began traveling to Iraq as a young reporter and many of the stories I did focused on the ongoing death toll and suffering caused by Bush's war and the economic weapon of sanctions.

**Jeremy Scahill (reporting for Democracy Now!):** One-and-a-half-year-old Hamoudi Abbas is going to die. Maybe in a week, maybe in a month, maybe in a year. But his doctor says he won't see a third birthday. Hamoudi was just diagnosed with lymphoma-cancer of the lymph nodes. His face is severely disfigured by a large softball size tumor that presses against his left eye. He wears a bib around his neck that says "I Love My Mommy." The bib is covered in the blood that Hamoudi has been coughing up.

His doctor, Mohammed Kamel, says that with adequate drugs Hammoudi would have a solid chance of beating the cancer. But he says that because of shortages

caused by the U.S.-led sanctions, the necessary drugs are simply not available.

**Mohammed Kamel:** Die within a week some of them, within a month some of them, even a year, but will die sooner or later.

**JS (report continues):** Hamoudi is one of the thousands of children in southern Iraq that have fallen victim to the cancer epidemic that has plagued the region since the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

**JS:** Reporting from Iraq's hospitals felt to me like reporting from death rows for infants. Doctors would tell you that they knew how to treat their patients, but they didn't have the supplies or the medications necessary to do so. Syringes were being reused. Tylenol was banned. Bleach was banned. Equipment for X-Ray machines was banned. I saw children born with congenital birth defects that did not exist in modern medical journals. The U.S. strategy was to starve, kill, torture Iraqis into rising up against Saddam Hussein. And I saw with my own eyes how U.S. policy made Saddam stronger and how it forced Iraqis that may have organized their own version of an Arab Spring uprising to spend every ounce of their human energy on simply surviving. Iraq is why I ultimately became a reporter. I'm still haunted by the memories of the dead, I saw there, particularly the children.

In Iraq, I spent a lot of time with the U.S. peace activist Kathy Kelly, the co-founder of the group Voices in the Wilderness. She went to Iraq during the '91 Gulf War and camped out in the desert in protest of that war. She spent extensive time in Baghdad as the missiles rained down. And then throughout the 1990s, Kathy lived for long periods in Iraq over the years, organizing against the sanctions and the bombings implemented by Bush and continued by Clinton.

**Kathy Kelly:** I mean, I really believe that the strategy was to say to every other country in the region, maybe in the world: "If you do not subordinate yourselves to fill our national interest, to serve our national interest, we can eliminate you and if you don't believe it, look at Saddam Hussein, look at Iraq."

**JS:** As we watch the coverage on corporate television of George H.W. Bush, the focus when it comes to Iraq is how Bush built this coalition of willing nations to

force Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait. There's no mention of how the U.S. was arming Saddam for a decade prior to that, helping him identify targets to bomb in Iran. No mention of how Bush encouraged Iraqis to rise up and then gave Saddam the green light to slaughter those who had risen against him.

**GHWB:** There's another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands to force Saddam Hussein the dictator to step aside.

**JS:** Their scant mention of the role that the U.S. played in fueling and arming the Iran-Iraq war that preceded the invasion of Kuwait. There's no mention of how the CIA cultivated and supported Saddam in his rise to power. There's no talk of how the U.S. ambassador told Saddam before the invasion of Kuwait that the U.S. didn't have a position on Arab-Arab disputes. None of this. It's as though history exists in a vacuum that will allow nothing in except the sanitized, U.S. empire narrative.

To truly understand the massive scale of the crimes that George H.W. Bush committed in Iraq, we must look at the 1991 Gulf War and all the civilian targets the U.S. intentionally bombed. But we must also look at Bush's role in supporting Saddam right up until the eve of that war. We have to talk about Saddam and his CIA friends. We have to talk about the sanctions that lived on for more than a decade after Bush left office and continued to kill innocent people. And we have to talk about the horrors in Iraq today and how they can all be traced to the legacy that George H.W. Bush built.

**KK:** It became, I think, such a difficult setting in which to live that people actually would say if there is a light at the tunnel it's probably only a train coming to run us over. And that ended up being sort of true and I – thinking of all that in relation to the formation of jihadist groups, we really shouldn't be surprised. I mean, I sometimes think if even a tiny fraction of what Iraqis were afflicted with – in terms of war, and sanctions, and indignities, and displacement, refugees, separation of families, all the I suppose, collateral consequences of war – had happened here in the United States, do we think there might be vigilante groups that might form up and might become violent and say if we get guns we're going to shoot the people that we think? So, I mean, we're just over and over again in Syria and now,



in Yemen, creating the likelihood of groups like ISIS, like Al Qaeda, and U.S. people are so undereducated about those connections.

**JS:** That again was Kathy Kelly of Voices in the Wilderness.

## **Iraqi Poet and Scholar Sinan Antoon Describes His Life Under The U.S.-Backed Dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and The Horrors of the Gulf War**

Well, joining me now is the celebrated Iraqi poet, scholar, novelist Sinan Antoon. He is an associate professor at New York University in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Sinan was born and raised in Baghdad where he finished his Bachelor's in English at Baghdad University in 1990. He left Iraq and came to the United States after the 1991 Gulf War where he was educated at Georgetown and Harvard obtaining a doctorate in Arabic literature in 2006. Sinan's books have been widely published in Arabic and other languages. Among those available in English are his poetry collection, "The Baghdad Blues," his novel "I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody," and, most recently, his novel "The Corpse Washer." He also made a powerful documentary about his return to Baghdad after the U.S. invasion in 2003. It's called "About Baghdad." Back in March, Sinan Antoon published an Op-Ed in the New York Times on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq by Bush's son. That article was titled "Fifteen Years Ago, America Destroyed My Country." Sinan Antoon, welcome to Intercepted.

**Sinan Antoon:** Thank you for having me.

**JS:** First I want to just get your immediate eulogy of sorts to George H.W. Bush. How do you remember him? How should history remember him?

**SA:** Well, history should remember him as a war criminal because that is what he is. For me personally, having gone through the experience of being in a shelter in Baghdad in 1991 and having watched how Bush's war destroyed Iraq. I mean, of

course, the declared objective was to liberate Kuwait which many Iraqis were fine by because they were against the occupation of Kuwait.

**GHWB:** Our objectives are clear. Saddam Hussein's forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place and Kuwait will once again be free.

**SA:** But, liberating Kuwait did not require the, what Jim Baker said, bombing back to the "pre-industrial age." So, one thing for citizens to realize if they want to know why Iraq was so, the situation was so horrendous and tragic, is because a lot of the roots of what's happening now, and what's been happening since 2003, has to do with George Bush's policies and the barbaric bombardment of Iraq for over a month and a half when I was in Baghdad, where it wasn't military installations only, 114 bridges, water treatment plants, everything. And I am someone who grew up, yes, under dictatorship, but I am of the generation that drank very clean potable water and lived a relatively good life and all of that in a way began to crumble and decline after 1991.

And more importantly also, at the time, the U.S. through the UN imposed sanctions on Iraq to force Iraq to leave Kuwait and when the sanctions did not work, of course, there was the so-called liberation of Kuwait. But these sanctions were maintained under Bush Sr. and then Clinton which we know now killed 1 million civilians, a lot of children. So, basically the destruction of the modern state of Iraq – its institutions, its facilities, the social fabric, the destruction of the Iraqi middle class, and forcing three million Iraqis throughout the 90s to leave – all of that is part of Bush's legacy.

**JS:** I want to back up quite a bit. In the 1950s, General Abd al-Karim Qasim was ruling Iraq. He, like Mossadegh in Iran, was moving to nationalize oil in Iraq. He was in the context of the Cold War open to doing business with many countries in the world, including the Soviet Union, and push through some fairly progressive – certainly by today's standards, if you look at the Saudis and others – progressive social platforms.

The CIA in the early 1950s began cultivating the Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein.

And ultimately, when Abdul Karim Qasim was overthrown, the CIA gave lists of people that were “suspected Communists” to assassination rings including Ba’ath Party assassination rings.

**Newscaster:** A new government which promises a modification of Qasim’s bitterly anti-British, anti-American, and anti-Nasser policies has been emptying the jails of political prisoners and replacing them with communists rounded up since the revolution. What the final impact will be nobody can say.

**JS:** Talk about the takeover by Saddam Hussein of Iraq and the Ba’ath Party, the U.S. support and the politics of that moment in Iraqi history.

**SA:** Yes, I mean, I’m happy you brought this up because until today Abd al-Karim Qasim retains huge popularity amongst the Iraqis, because of his, as you said, his progressive record. And it was really stunning by the standards of the time and because he was a nationalist. And you know, one of the leaders of the Ba’ath later in his memoirs said, “We came on an American train.” So, everyone knew –

**JS:** I believe he said, “We came on a CIA train.”

**SA:** Well, yeah –

**JS:** Same difference. But yes, it’s an amazing admission.

**SA:** Everyone knows that. And you know speaking of the ’91 wars, it’s only until Saddam Hussein crossed the red line and invaded Kuwait because he misread the signs or he was fooled by the United States Ambassador, April Glaspie, saying in her meeting with him, “We have no position on Arab-Arab disputes.”

**Senator Alan Cranston:** Did you say “We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab consulates like your border disagreement with Kuwait”?

**April Glaspie:** Yes, that was one part of my sentence. The other part of my sentence was but we insist that you settle your disputes with Kuwait non-violently. And he told me he would do so.

**SA:** That’s when Saddam Hussein was transformed from the secular ally, not only

for the United States, for France, and other so-called Western liberal democracies, and he became the enemy. But before that, throughout there was definite support throughout, and especially, during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

But for me, I grew up as a youngster in Baghdad and I still remember when Saddam Hussein was the vice president. But everyone knew that he was the most powerful person in a way because he had consolidated a lot of power under his control, especially, in terms of intelligence and internal security. And in 1979, he pushed aside Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, who had been president and took full power. And then so, very quickly of course, the tensions with Iran started and Saddam waged the Iran-Iraq war.

And one of the images that always stays with me – and I make sure to write about it to remind fellow citizens because they are so forgetful – is that I remember watching the evening news in Baghdad and hearing as a teenager also that you know, President Reagan sending [a] congratulatory telegram to Saddam Hussein. And then seeing Donald Rumsfeld come as the emissary, and it was known that the United States was supporting the Iraqi regime with intelligence to make sure of course that the war lasts as long as possible. I think Henry Kissinger said that the longer that war lasts the better. So, when we come to 2002 I, myself, but many Iraqis we would not take Donald Rumsfeld seriously when he speaks of the liberty and well-being of other people.

**JS:** And Donald Rumsfeld multiple times visited Baghdad to meet with Saddam Hussein over the course of '83 and 1984. Donald Rumsfeld brought a gift from Ronald Reagan and it was a pair of golden cowboy spurs that were given to Saddam Hussein. But I bring that up not to just tell you the bit of trivia about the cowboy spurs, but to remind people that when Saddam was at his most brutal was when he had the full support of the United States in the 1980s, lifting him off the list of state sponsors of terrorism, selling him weapons, sending U.S. generals to Baghdad to help them plot their bombing runs in Iran.

Part of this story – it's the George H.W. Bush eulogy on Iraq – is basically Kuwait was invaded. Bush put together a coalition of willing nations, including many Arab Nations and liberated Kuwait. And then, wisely made the decision to keep

Saddam in power. But in fact, that's not the beginning of the George H.W. Bush-Iraq story, the Iran-Iraq war and supporting the brutal dictatorship of Saddam during that period prior to the Gulf War.

**SA:** The brutality against the Kurds and the use of chemical weapons, I mean, those chemical weapons we forget also were supplied by the United States. And also, about the issue of invading Kuwait, and of course, I, and many Iraqis, were against [the] invasion of Kuwait, but how the Saudi Arabian ruling family was convinced to allow U.S. troops to come into Saudi Arabia, was that Dick Cheney flew into Saudi Arabia and showed the king satellite images that supposedly showed that Iraqi troops were in an offensive position. But that is not true and not correct.

**JS:** Dick Cheney, at the time, was the defense secretary.

**SA:** Yes, was the defense secretary.

Not that I was for the invasion of Kuwait. But Saddam was not going to invade the entire Arabian Peninsula. But of course, this was handed on a platter of gold because after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this was really American fantasy, imperial fantasy come true, is to have military permanent military bases in the Arabian Peninsula.

**JS:** Your entire life that you lived in Iraq, Saddam Hussein was in power either as vice president or as president. What was it like growing up in Iraq?

**SA:** I mean, it was very difficult growing up under a dictatorship, of course. So one, you know, had to acclimate and there was a climate of fear, in a way, because once one's life could easily end and one could go into prison very easy. That's why the first novel that I wrote in Arabic and then co-translated into English is about what it means to be a young university student living under a dictatorship and in a war. And it was really terrible and horrific, but I want to point to the fact that the problem in a lot of discourse is the conflation, of course, the Saddam regime, and the Iraqi state, and Iraqi society. Of course, many of us hated Saddam Hussein and wanted him to be removed or to be weakened, but it was really tragic and horrific.

**GHWB:** Secretary Cheney and Chairman Powell, they had a very good visit out there to the Gulf area talking to our commanders. I'm very satisfied having heard their briefing with the progress in the war. The air campaign has been very, very effective and it will continue for a while.

**SA:** But I remember members of my family who are older, who had you know, built the country themselves as engineers, to see the country being really destroyed in a month and a half. I think it's really important for American citizens and others to realize what George Bush and what their country did. Dictatorship or not because the dictatorship issue is used to justify wars.

**JS:** Politically, economically, culturally, what was Iraq like prior to the '91 Gulf War?

**SA:** First of all, the first TV station in the Middle East was in Iraq. The first female minister in any cabinet was in Iraq, at the time [of] Abd Al-Karim Qasim. The most progressive set of laws that have to do with women's rights were set in Iraq in 1960 and '61. And in terms of land reform, in terms of social justice, also, there was a very powerful Communist Party movement, very progressive. Beginning in the '50s also, for example, the flourishing culture of efflorescence in Iraq. The movement of new poetry, new free-verse started out in Iraq, would change the way Arabic poetry had been written.

So by 1991, of course, we had dictatorship. We had a lot of problems because of the long war with Iran, but there was a very solid bureaucracy. There was a very good educational system that for example, I went to college in Baghdad and my professors had been graduates of Stanford, and Chicago, and Harvard, and elsewhere. And most importantly there was an excellent healthcare system that was free. So, I and many others who had certain health problems could get excellent health care for the equivalent of 25 cents back then. Now, all of that, in addition to the clean water that I discussed, excellent facilities and infrastructure, all of that was destroyed in 1991.

And it was destroyed because of the policies of the United States and George Bush. That cannot be erased no matter what CNN or the others say this reality, this is in

the public record. So, George Bush, the father, contributed largely to policies that ended up destroying or beginning the destruction of the modern state of Iraq. So, it is basically transforming Iraq from a functioning, largely secular society into a society that is experiencing slow death.

**JS:** Before Desert Storm was launched, the Iraqi dinar, one Iraqi dinar was worth three American dollars. Iraq was importing labor. It had both the Tigris and Euphrates River. It was agriculturally, [a] very diverse and productive country and over the course of less than two months, it was bombed back to a totally different era and all of the institutions you're describing, all of that day-to-day culture, was just obliterated basically overnight when Bush launched this war.

**SA:** I mean, and I remember, at the time I was in Baghdad, and we would go during the day and survey the damage. So, there are you know, post offices were bombed. And what did that have to do with Kuwait? And it was such an extensive bombing even, I remember it sometimes. It's absurd. There's a small office somewhere on the outskirts of Baghdad where retired military officers go to receive their pensions that was bombed too. And so, I, you know, we say it so much, we don't think of it. Think of the arrogance and the barbarism in the phrase itself "We'll bomb them back to the pre-industrial age."

And I mean, I was lucky when I came to the U.S. to study under Hanna Batatu at Georgetown. He's probably written one of the best books on Iraq, and in 1993, he said, based on all of the statistics and what we're talking about, that what is happening in Iraq is genocide. And we already knew in the early '90s, early on, that these, also, the effects of the bombing, and the sanctions were not really hurting the regime that much. Actually, the regime and the ruling elite benefited from it but it was hurting the very same people it was supposed to, whose lives it was supposed to me make better. And people forget now the many, you know, officials from the UN who resigned because they couldn't be part of this type of policy.

**Amy Goodman:** On March 31st, Hans von Sponeck, a German national with a more than 30-year career at the UN, resigned his post as the UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq and protest of the sanctions. He is the person in charge of the UN's Oil-for-Food Program in Iraq. Von Sponeck's resignation comes just more

than a year after the resignation of Dennis Halladay from that same post for the same reasons.

**JS:** And this was under Bill Clinton, primarily. It started under Bush but the real economic killing fields of Iraq with real victims, many of them women and children, were these economic sanctions.

**SA:** Yes, I mean, I remember a relative of mine, who as I said, was watching all the bombing and he was really of course, devastated because this is a young, as a young engineer, he helped to build a lot of these bridges and a lot of these buildings. But he was saying basically that what that war and the bombing did not destroy, the sanctions will destroy slowly. There is a very excellent book by Joy Gordon about what the sanctions against Iraq mean, and our responsibility, and the country's responsibility in perpetrating that genocide. When we went to Baghdad with a collective to make a documentary about Baghdad, I interviewed of course, tens of people and one woman told me, you know, an Iraqi woman, a mother told me, "I will forgive the United States for the bombing, but I will not forgive them for the sanctions because with the bombing you can hide in the shelter. You can try to survive two, three hours, but what do you do with the sanctions when you cannot get the milk to feed your child."

**JS:** On the eve of the 2003 invasion-occupation, I went, in Baghdad, to visit a clinic which had the only functioning x-ray machine capable of detecting certain kinds of cancer. The line was days long. People would camp out waiting to have an x-ray there because they were not able to import the parts necessary to properly maintain their x-ray machine. Bleach was not allowed. When you would go into Iraqi hospitals under the sanctions, petrol was being used as a disinfectant. The hospital smelled like a mixture of blood, death, and gasoline.

When George H.W. Bush authorized and carried out the decimation of Iraqi civil society, then followed up by the economic sanctions, it was like a death sentence on a death sentence for the Iraqi people.

**SA:** Definitely and we should also mention the use of depleted uranium because also in 1991, the United States heavily used depleted uranium in the munitions



they used and that caused an explosion in the rates of leukemia –

**JS:** Congenital birth defects.

**SA:** Birth defects. And today, I mean, I published an article in Arabic about what, the legacy of George Bush, and I got a lot of responses from people who live in Basra, in southern Iraq today and are still suffering from the consequences. And of course, even the veterans suffered from that, you know, the so-called Gulf War syndrome is just another way of not talking about it.

**JS:** The Amiriyah shelter in Baghdad was a bomb shelter. And on, I believe it was in February of 1991, that shelter was bombed and more than 400 people were killed inside. Talk about that particular strike.

**SA:** I mean, that's one of the most salient examples again of the, of course, the barbarism of that war and the disregard for Iraqi lives, basically, for civilian lives. Because they knew that that was a civilian shelter really. Of course, the claim was that there were some Ba'ath Party officials were going there. But I mean, of course, they go during the daylight to check on their families. But it was a place where the families who lived in that neighborhood would, of course, go to seek shelter and hundreds of people were burnt to death inside that shelter and the United States never of course, apologized. For many Iraqis, that is one eternal reminder of what the United States did to Iraq and to Iraqi civilians.

**JS:** During this discussion, you've mentioned April Glaspie's name. And of course, April Glaspie was the senior U.S. official who met with Saddam Hussein and they discussed the issue of Kuwait. Saddam's government's position was that the Kuwaitis were diagonally drilling from Kuwaiti territory into Iraq and illicitly stealing Iraqi oil to sell on the international market. But there was a brewing conflict between Kuwait and Iraq at the Arab League and the United States was aware of it. What do we know about the meeting that happened between April Glaspie, who was representing the Bush White House at the time, and Saddam Hussein before the Gulf War starts?

**SA:** I mean there were a lot of tensions already and I think it's important to re-

member, of course, Saddam Hussein and the regime is responsible primarily, but I think the United States in a way, choreographed the situation and also emboldened the Kuwaitis to not be diplomatic and not give in. So, the Iraqi regime had billions and billions of dollars of debt because of the war and the Kuwaitis were not willing to forgive those debts, in addition to the problems because of oil prices. But, it's crucial to remember that as you said April Glaspie in her meeting with Saddam Hussein when the issue of the tensions with Kuwait coming up, she told him that the United States has no opinion or no position on Arab-Arab disputes.

And we know now from the memoirs of his secretary that after that meeting Saddam Hussein asked for the transcript and he highlighted that sentence. And obviously, of course, the United States knows how to play to the fantasies and megalomania of these dictators as it often does. And so, he took that to mean that he would invade in Kuwait would not be necessarily a big problem.

**JS:** And why wouldn't he think that also, because he was so used to having American military planners in Baghdad helping him pick out targets to bomb another one of his neighbors, Iran?

**SA:** Exactly and after, even after the invasion, in a lot of the interviews with the American media, he said, you know, "We're not going to drink the oil. We're gonna sell it." Which means that he was slightly surprised and in the first speech he gave, a few hours after the beginning of the bombing on the 17th of January – I remember because we were fleeing our house to go to what we were told was a shelter, but actually was just a basement of a restaurant – but I heard him on the radio saying basically that they have betrayed us. And I think he also thought, unfortunately, his miscalculations, that the United States will go and have its basis in the Arabian Peninsula, but they will not wage war against him.

So, the United States is also complicit in playing basically a lot of these dictators, including Saddam Hussein himself. And I want to go back to what happened after the land war and the bombing that what the United States did is it helped Saddam crush the uprising in Iraq. And more importantly, the United States decimated all those poor Iraqis who were forced and drafted into the army and it kept the Re-

publican guards, the elite units, because it had defanged Saddam regionally, in a way, had destroyed his army. Iraq would have really no influence in regional affairs anymore but wanted really to keep the regime intact.

And that is very important to remember so that fellow citizens, hopefully – and I hope it never happens again – erase this notion or demystify this notion that somehow the United States supports any expressions of democracy and is not consistently supportive of dictators no matter how brutal and barbaric they are to their own populations.

**JS:** As we wrap up this specific discussion, Sinan, I wanted to ask you about current-day Iraq and how much of the situation we're witnessing there now can be traced back to the period when George H.W. Bush was vice-president and ultimately president during the Iran-Iraq War and then launching the Gulf War.

**SA:** The United States was supportive of Saddam Hussein until the 2nd of August 1990 when he invaded Kuwait. That's when they and the Brits were at pains to find some Iraqi opposition folks. And of course, they went and brought the mostly unsavory characters and basically created this so-called the Iraqi opposition. Figures who, most of whom had no constituency inside Iraq and most of them were very sectarian, were either based in Tehran, in Iran or had contacts with Saudi intelligence, or Syrian intelligence. And then, those folks are the ones who were brought in 2003 to form the core of the new regime. And then, you know, you have the so-called pundits and experts being really shocked that this new ruling elite is sectarian and is pro-Iran. I mean, that's where you brought them from. They had no constituency inside Iraq. Most of them were really, really corrupt. So, George Bush Sr. this will be on him as long as I'm alive. And this is the actual record. So, he is primarily responsible for a lot of the damage and the horror that Iraqis lived through and continue to live through until today.

**JS:** Sinan Antoon, thank you very much for joining us.

**SA:** Thank you.

**JS:** Sinan Antoon is a celebrated Iraqi poet, scholar and novelist. He's an associate

professor at New York University. He was born and raised in Baghdad. To end today's show, we asked Sinan to perform one of his poems. It's called "To an Iraqi Infant." Written in the mid-1990s, Sinan Antoon's poem is about the impact of economic sanctions on Iraqi civilians imposed by George H.W. Bush after his 1991 Gulf War.

**SA:** Do you know that your mother's nipples are dry bones? That her breasts are bursting with depleted uranium?

Do you know that the womb's window overlooks a confiscated land?

Do you know that your tomorrow has no tomorrow? And that your blood is the ink of new maps?

Do you know that your mother is weaving the slowness of her moments into an elegy? And she is already mourning you?

Don't be shy. Your funeral is over. The tears are dry and everyone's gone.

Come forward. It's only a short way. Don't be late. Your grave is looking at its watch.

Don't be afraid. We'll arrange your bones whichever way you want and leave your skull like a flower on top.

Come forward. Your many friends await and there are more every day.

Your ghosts will play together.

**JS:** Iraqi poet, author and scholar Sinan Antoon.

[Music interlude.]

**JS:** That does it for this week's show. If you are not yet a sustaining member of Intercepted, log onto the [intercept.com/join](https://www.intercept.com/join).

Intercepted is a production of First Look Media and The Intercept. We're distributed by Panoply. Our producer is Jack D'Isidoro and our executive producer is

Leital Molad. Laura Flynn is associate producer. Elise Swain is our assistant producer and graphic designer. Rick Kwan mixed the show. Our music, as always, was composed by DJ Spooky. Until next week, I'm Jeremy Scahill.



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