**As U.S. Moves to Oust Maduro, Is Invading Venezuela Next?**

Allan Nairn on Trump’s Attempted Coup

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Democracy Now

GUESTS

Allan Nairn: award-winning investigative journalist. He is a two-time winner of the George Polk Award and a recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, as well as the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award.

The United States is continuing to ratchet up pressure on the Venezuelan government in an attempt to topple President Nicolás Maduro. On Tuesday, the State Department announced it is giving control of Venezuela’s U.S. bank accounts to opposition leader **Juan Guaidó, who declared himself to be president** last week. Meanwhile, the U.S. has also refused to rule out a military invasion of Venezuela. We spend the hour with prize-winning investigative journalist Allan Nairn.

AMY GOODMAN: The United States is continuing to ratchet up pressure on the Venezuelan government in an attempt to topple President Nicolás Maduro. On Tuesday, the State Department announced it’s **giving control of Venezuela’s U.S. bank accounts to opposition leader Juan Guaidó,** who declared himself president of Venezuela last week.

This came a day after the **U.S. imposed a de facto embargo on oil from Venezuela’s state-run oil company, PDVSA**. The new sanctions include exemptions for several U.S. firms, including Chevron and Halliburton, to allow them to continue working in Venezuela.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has also refused to rule out a military invasion of Venezuela. On Monday, national security adviser John Bolton was photographed holding a notepad on which he had written the words “**5,000 troops to Colombia**.”

Earlier today, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro tweeted, quote, “People of the U.S., I ask for your support to reject the interference of Donald Trump’s government in **making My Homeland a Vietnam in Latin America**. Don’t Allow It!” he tweeted. President Maduro told a Russian news network Wednesday he was open to negotiating with the opposition.

Major opposition protests are planned for today. On Tuesday, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights criticized the Venezuelan government for cracking down on earlier protests. According to the U.N., at least 40 people have been killed and 850 detained since the recent round of anti-government protests began.

On Tuesday, Vice President **Mike Pence met with members of the Venezuelan opposition at the White House.** Trump’s **new special envoy to Venezuela**, **Elliott Abrams,** also took part in the meetings. **Elliott Abrams is a right-wing hawk who was convicted in 1991 for lying to Congress during the Iran-Contra scandal, but he was later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush**. Abrams defended **Guatemalan dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt** as he oversaw a campaign of mass murder and torture of indigenous people in Guatemala in the 1980s. Ríos Montt was later convicted of genocide. **Abrams was also linked to the 2002 coup in Venezuela that attempted to topple Hugo Chávez.**

Well, today we spend the hour looking at the crisis in Venezuela and the appointment of Elliott Abrams as special envoy. We’re joined by the award-winning investigative journalist Allan Nairn, who has closely tracked Elliott Abrams’ record for over three decades. Allan Nairn is two-time winner of the George Polk Award, a recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award for International Reporting. Allan spoke with us earlier this week from Jakarta, Indonesia. He began by talking about the significance of the appointment of Elliott Abrams.

ALLAN NAIRN: What his appointment emphasizes, re-emphasizes—it was already obvious—was that the **U.S. is trying to overthrow the government of Venezuela and that it will be willing to use violence, to use military force, if necessary**. That’s what Abrams, and indeed U.S. policy, has been all about.

I think their first preference would be to have a successful covert operation. Mike Pompeo, when he was in charge of the CIA, all but stated it publicly. At one point when he was speaking in Aspen at one of those gatherings of the elite, he gave the rough outlines of an operation, in coordination with U.S. allies like Colombia, to topple the Maduro government in Venezuela. And now, just recently, the night before Guaidó declared himself as the new president of Venezuela, he was **on the phone with Mike Pence directly.** Pence was—The Wall Street Journal broke the story. Pence was directly talking to him, and the next day he comes out and **declares himself as the president of Venezuela.** And now they’re asking—they’re offering incentives to Venezuelan Army officers to come over to their side and hoping that the U.S. can re-establish control of Venezuela in that manner.

But if that fails, I think there is a chance that the U.S. would consider an invasion of Venezuela. This would not be the first or even the second or third preference of the Pentagon or the CIA or the State Department. But it might be very attractive to Donald Trump, for several reasons.

In 2016, during the campaign, speaking of Iraq, Trump said, “To the victor belong the spoils. **You have to go in and take the oil.**” You could call this a Trump doctrine. And **Venezuela has the world’s largest oil reserves.** Now, very often oil is used as the explanation for the motive for U.S. invasions and foreign policy, and I think its role is usually way overblown. People give it too much weight in the analysis. But in this case, it might turn out to be very relevant, given that Trump has that doctrine and is now personally in power.

Secondly, politically, Trump needs a new war. Trump has been stuck with, for him, being in the embarrassing position of just being able to continue the old W. Bush and Obama wars. **There’s a consensus among U.S. mainstream historians that no president can be great unless he has a war**. They say this all the time. And Trump now, of course, is in some political difficulty.

So, for him, an action where the U.S. went into Venezuela in spectacular fashion, did it quick, in the style of the U.S. invasions of Grenada or Panama, didn’t get bogged down, but just went in, say, for a few weeks, killed without restraint, which is the doctrine Trump is now applying to U.S. forces worldwide—I mean, he’s basically told the CIA and the Pentagon, “Don’t worry about any constraints on civilian casualties that may have existed before. Do what you will.” In fact, in Afghanistan, he celebrated the dropping of what was called the mother of all bombs, this massive explosive which is the closest conventional explosive that you can get to a nuclear weapon. This was dropped in a mountainous region of Afghanistan, and Trump was crowing about it afterwards. So, a quick invasion with massive force that succeeds in toppling the Maduro government, and then where the U.S. gets out quickly, is the kind of thing that could, in theory, be attractive to Trump. And it’s also the kind of thing that, I guarantee you, **would be praised to the heavens on CNN and on MSNBC**. And this would be a sweet political victory for Trump.

Now, whether it’s actually possible to pull off a quick successful military invasion of Venezuela is entirely a different question, because it would face major resistance even if, you know, some of the Army had already switched sides to the U.S. side. There would be a lot of people who would want to resist it.

But it is the case that the reality in Venezuela today is very different than it has been during earlier years of the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela. The U.S. has always—and this is an important point for understanding U.S. context—**the U.S. doesn’t care at all about elections. They don’t care at all about the poor.** Completely fake elections are fine with them. The U.S. just, you know, not long ago, finished ratifying a fraudulent election in Honduras, where Hernández imposed himself for re-election, and he did that with the assistance of Mike Pence and others. They don’t care about the poor. They targeted Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian movement from the beginning. In 2002, even though Chávez had, not long before, been re-elected in a clean vote, a completely clean vote—for years, the Carter Center, and other international monitors who went to Venezuela, was reporting that their electoral system was, in that era—they did a clean count. They were not rigged elections. Despite that, despite the fact that the **Chávez administration was making great strides in raising living standards for the poor, starting to lower the levels of malnutrition, starting to raise the levels of general health**—or maybe because of that—the U.S., in 2002, backed a coup against Chávez, that briefly removed him but was ultimately unsuccessful, because the population and much of the security forces rallied to Chávez’s side and they thwarted the U.S. effort to oust him.

Today it’s a different situation. The U.S. has been trying to undermine the Venezuelan government ever since the Chávez years, as has the Venezuelan oligarchy. In fact, not long after the brief failed coup, which was backed by the U.S., **the rich of Venezuela, the business owners, went on a capital strike.** They purposely shut down their businesses, and it had huge impact. They succeeded in shaving something like 27 percent off the gross domestic product of Venezuela, which is just astonishing, catastrophic, in a short time. But even that failed to topple Chávez.

But in the conditions we have today, where Maduro does not have near the popular support that Chávez did, where **he’s really been running the country into the ground** and has been using the fact that the U.S. is trying to undermine the government as a universal excuse for everything, for **his own incompetence and corruption and brutality against protesters in the streets**, this government, the Maduro government, is in a rather weak position. And it appears that the population is now becoming rather divided. For years, the opposition in Venezuela was kind of a classical rightist Latin American force, with **the rich, the very rich, the oligarchs, the top businesspeople** aligned with many sectors of the middle class. But now it seems that opposition has spread, and there are many poor people who are part of it. So, this means this Maduro government is rather weak and is vulnerable to being toppled. It is possible. It’s not impossible, as it was in previous years under Chávez.

But—and this is important to note—even though much of the U.S. news coverage and many of the U.S. analysts note the fact that a lot of poor people are now joining and going into the streets protesting against Maduro, **there is absolutely no way that the U.S. will allow a poor people’s movement**—let’s say, a new—imagine if such a thing came into being, a poor people’s movement in Venezuela that did want to oust Maduro but replace it with a new policy that was also pro-poor and sought to gain justice. There’s no way the U.S. would tolerate that. **The U.S. will insist that a new opposition that comes to power be controlled by the far-right elements who represent the very rich and are willing to take instructions from Washington, as was clearly illustrated in the case of Pence and the newly proclaimed president of—self-proclaimed president of Venezuela**. So, it’s a very dangerous situation right now.

And I think what the proper role for the U.S. at this moment is, one, to lift the sanctions, lift the stranglehold that is currently increasing the level of hunger. There’s a level of misery in Venezuela that was already caused by the incompetence of this government, but the U.S. has done everything it can to increase it. Just in the past few days, for example, **the U.S. has been moving legally to block the Venezuelan government from using $1.2 billion worth of gold**, which it has stored in London. And in doing this, they’re being backed by the opposition, by Guaidó. And this will mean **less money available in Venezuela to buy basic provisions, basic supplies, food, medicine**, etc. So, first, lift the stranglehold.

And secondly, disavow the invasion option, and then step back. You know, some people in the Democratic Party, for example, in the United States float the idea of the U.S. trying to facilitate, be the mediator, in finding a political solution for Venezuela. But that’s not appropriate. **The U.S. has no standing to be a mediator**, a disinterested third party. The U.S. is on one side. They’re on the side of the right and the rich in Venezuela who are trying to topple this government, and the U.S. is trying to overthrow the government. They can’t be a mediator. It’s somewhat comparable to Israel-Palestine, where, for years, the U.S. has claimed to be an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians, when in fact, everyone knows—it’s self-proclaimed—the U.S. is on the side of the Israelis and against the aspirations of the Palestinians to have their legal rights under international law enforced and to regain their political sovereignty. And yet they claim to be a mediator. So the U.S. should not try to insert itself and claim to be a political mediator in Venezuela, either.

For that, you would need an outside party that has some credibility, maybe, you know, a figure like the pope or some outside countries who could play that role. A couple of years ago the pope was involved in such an effort, but he received no backing from the U.S. at the time, because they don’t really want a political solution that leads to a truly open political field where all options are available, where perhaps, you know, maybe a different government, but one that is pro-poor and anti-U.S., could gain power. You know, if you had a genuinely open political process in Venezuela, a political outcome like that is certainly not inconceivable. But the U.S. would never tolerate that.

So they’re now trying to engineer a way for the U.S. to regain control. And to do that, they’ll be willing to use violence as necessary, if necessary. And for that, Abrams is the perfect man for the job.

AMY GOODMAN: Investigative journalist Allan Nairn.

**Allan Nairn: Trump’s Venezuela Envoy Elliott Abrams Is a War Criminal Who Has Abetted Genocide**

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In an ongoing effort to topple Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, **Vice President Mike Pence met with members of the Venezuelan opposition at the White House** Tuesday alongside Trump’s new special envoy to Venezuela, **Elliott Abrams**. Elliott Abrams is a right-wing hawk who was convicted in 1991 for lying to Congress during the Iran-Contra scandal, but he was later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush. Abrams defended Guatemalan dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt as he oversaw a campaign of mass murder and torture of indigenous people in Guatemala in the 1980s. Ríos Montt was later convicted of genocide. Abrams was also linked to the 2002 coup in Venezuela that attempted to topple Hugo Chávez. We look at Abrams’s track record with prize-winning investigative journalist Allan Nairn, who has closely tracked Abrams for over three decades. Nairn is two-time winner of the George Polk Award and a recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award.

AMY GOODMAN: This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org. I’m Amy Goodman. As we continue to look at the crisis in Venezuela, we return to my conversation with award-winning investigative journalist Allan Nairn. I asked him to talk more about Elliott Abrams, the new U.S. special envoy to Venezuela.

ALLAN NAIRN: Abrams was the key man in Reagan administration policy toward Central America, when that administration was abetting what a court recently ruled was a **genocide in Guatemala**, when the **U.S. was backing the army of El Salvador in a series of death squad assassinations and massacres, and when the U.S. was invading Nicaragua with a Contra force that went after what one U.S. general described as “soft targets,” meaning civilians, things like cooperatives.**

Abrams later came back during the George W. Bush administration, joined the National Security Council and was a **key man in implementing the U.S. policy of backing Israeli attacks against Gaza**, when the U.S. refused to accept the results of the Gaza elections, where Hamas defeated Fatah in a vote, and instead Abrams and company backed a war operation to overturn the results of the election, backing the forces of Mohammed Dahlan.

Some commentators have said, “Well, Abrams is not a Trump guy. He represents traditional, established U.S. foreign policy.” And that’s true. **The problem is that that U.S. policy has been to abet genocide when the U.S. feels it’s necessary.**

In the case of Guatemala, Abrams and the Reagan administration were approving the shipment of weapons, money, intelligence and the provision of political cover to the army of Guatemala as they were sweeping through the northwest Mayan highlands, **wiping out 662 rural villages, by the army’s own count, decapitating children, crucifying people**, using the tactics that in this era we associate with ISIS. In one particular case, in 1985, an activist for the relatives of the disappeared, named Rosario Godoy, was abducted by the army. She was raped. Her mutilated body was found alongside that of her baby. The baby’s fingernails had been torn out. The Guatemalan army, when asked about this atrocity, said, “Oh, they died in a traffic accident.” When Elliott Abrams was asked about this accident, he affirmed also that they died in a traffic accident. This activist raped and mutilated, the baby with his fingernails pulled out, Abrams says it’s a traffic accident.

It’s very parallel to the stance Abrams took on **Panama**. When Noriega, the CIA-backed dictator of Panama, who was involved in the drug traffic, who the U.S. later decided to overthrow—when the forces of Noriega abducted the Panamanian dissident Hugo Spadafora and cut off his head with a kitchen knife, Jesse Helms, of all people, tried to investigate in the U.S. Congress, and Elliott Abrams stopped him, saying, “No, we need Noriega. He’s doing a very good job. He’s working with us.”

In the case of **El Salvador**, after **the massacre in El Mozote**, where a U.S.-trained battalion massacred more than 500 civilians, slitting the throats of children along the way, Abrams took the lead in denying that such a thing had ever happened. And he later described the results of the Reagan administration policy, his policy, in El Salvador as a fabulous achievement. He said this even after the El Salvador Truth Commission had issued a report saying that **more than 85 percent of the atrocities had been committed by the armed forces and its death squads, death squads which had a particular practice of cutting off the genitals of their victims, stuffing them in their mouths and putting them on open display on the roadsides of El Salvador.**

When I appeared on the Charlie Rose TV show with Elliott Abrams, I suggested that he be put on trial, that he be brought before a Nuremberg-style tribunal and tried for his role in facilitating war crimes and crimes against humanity. He dismissed the idea of him being put on trial as “ludicrous,” but he did not actually deny any of the facts of what he has done—what he had done. He said it was all necessary in the context of the Cold War. So, this is Elliott Abrams, who has now been put in charge of key aspects of the U.S. policy toward Venezuela.

AMY GOODMAN: Allan, let’s go to that clip. This was in March of 1995, when you and Elliott Abrams were on PBS on the Charlie Rose show. It begins with you.

ALLAN NAIRN: I mean, I think you have to be—you have to apply uniform standards. President Bush once talked about putting Saddam Hussein on trial for crimes against humanity, Nuremberg-style tribunal. I think that’s a good idea. But if you’re serious, you have to be even-handed. If we look at a case like this, I think we have to talk—start talking about putting Guatemalan and U.S. officials on trial. I think someone like Mr. Abrams would be a fit—a subject for such a Nuremberg-style inquiry. But I agree with Mr. Abrams that Democrats would have to be in the dock with him. The Congress has been in on this. The Congress approved the sale of 16,000 M-16s to Guatemala. In ’87 and ’88—

CHARLIE ROSE: All right, but hold on one second. I just—before—because the—

ALLAN NAIRN: They voted more military aid than the Republicans asked for.

CHARLIE ROSE: Again, I invite you and Elliott Abrams back to discuss what he did. But right now, you—

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: No, thanks, Charlie, but I won’t accept—

CHARLIE ROSE: Hold on one second. Go ahead. You want to repeat the question, of you want to be in the dock?

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: It is ludicrous. It is ludicrous to respond to that kind of stupidity. This guy thinks we were on the wrong side in the Cold War. Maybe he personally was on the wrong side. I am one of the many millions of Americans who thinks we were happy to win.

CHARLIE ROSE: All right, I don’t—

ALLAN NAIRN: Mr. Abrams, you were on the wrong side in supporting the massacre of peasants and organizers, anyone who dared to speak, absolutely.

CHARLIE ROSE: What I want to do is I want to ask the following question.

ALLAN NAIRN: And that’s a crime. That’s a crime, Mr. Abrams, for which people should be tried. U.S. laws—

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: Why don’t you—yes, right, we’ll put all the American officials who won the Cold War in the dock.

AMY GOODMAN: So, Allan, that was Elliott Abrams responding to you on PBS, on the Charlie Rose show. Your response?

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, I think what he said in our exchange speaks for itself. But I should note that just last September, last September 26, a genocide trial—at a genocide trial in Guatemala, a trial in which I testified and gave evidence, the court ruled that what the Guatemalan army did in Guatemala—in the case of that particular trial, what they did to the Mayan Ixil people, but they also did it to others of the Mayan population in Guatemala—the **court formally ruled that that constituted genocide.** And in their ruling—and this is quite important—they said that this genocide was carried out by the Guatemalan army in accord with, and essentially at the behest of, U.S. policy, U.S. interests. So, as strong as the case was back in the 90s, when I argued on the Charlie Rose show that Abrams should be put on trial, now it’s even stronger, because you have the predicate of this genocide finding by the Guatemalan court saying that that genocide derived from U.S. policy. And that’s not even getting into what he did with El Salvador and Panama and Nicaragua and Palestine and other places.

AMY GOODMAN: Let me play for you what Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said when he announced that Elliott Abrams would be the point person on Venezuela.

SECRETARY OF STATE MIKE POMPEO: Elliott’s passion for the rights and liberties of all peoples makes him a perfect fit and a valuable and timely addition. … Elliott will be a true asset to our mission to help the Venezuelan people fully restore democracy and prosperity to their country.

AMY GOODMAN: Allan Nairn, your response?

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, Abrams indeed had passion. He had a lot of passion. And he is also very intelligent. So, when the U.S. was backing the Guatemalan army in what has now been ruled was genocide, when it was helping to back, train, even in some cases do joint interrogations with the death squads that the U.S. originally created, Abrams was very passionate in seeing that the weapons and the money got through, and in persistently going on American television, on shows like Nightline, and really crushing the weak-kneed Democrats who would be brought in to debate against him, because **Abrams would always make a principled case for what was, in effect, this U.S. support for mass murder and genocide in Central America.**

At that time, for example, in El Salvador, one of the immediate political issues was the government of President Duarte, and the army behind Duarte was being essentially facilitated, all but run by the United States, and rebels were challenging Duarte, trying to overthrow him. And Abrams would say to the Democrats, “Oh, so are you saying that we should let President Duarte fall? Is that what you’re saying? And let El Salvador go communist?” And the Democrats would crumble in the face of his argument and say, “Oh, no, no, we’re not saying that. We’re saying you have to—we have to keep President Duarte in power.” And then Abrams would say, “Well, how can you keep Duarte in power if we don’t back the Salvadoran army?”

So, he was always very passionate and committed. Committed to what? **Committed to mass killing in the service of what could be defined as U.S. interests or even U.S. whim,** because, in fact, although it was being portrayed by Abrams and others at the time as a battle to prevent El Salvador and Guatemala and Nicaragua from becoming wings of the Soviet Union, anyone familiar with the facts on the ground knew that that was ridiculous. That was not at all what was at stake. What was at stake was a battle between local oligarchies, who were driving the poor peasant and small working-class majorities in those countries to the brink of hunger, and in some cases over the brink. Half of children in the poorest areas were dying before the age of 5. **People who dared to speak up against the oligarchs who were imposing these economic conditions, or against the army, were snatched, abducted by U.S.-backed death squads**. The guy who was the creator of the Salvadoran death squads, General Chele Medrano, described this to me in great detail, in 13 hours of interviews. He actually showed me a silver medal which was presented to him in the Oval Office for what was called exceptionally meritorious service, originally starting in the administration of President Lyndon Johnson, and this continued all the way up into the time of Abrams. That’s what the U.S. was doing. And that’s what he was passionately defending. And it had nothing to do with defending the liberties of people. It’s more like defending the liberties of generals and corporations and dictators.

AMY GOODMAN: Let’s go to what happened in Iran-Contra in the 1980s. Ultimately, Elliott Abrams was found guilty of lying to Congress, I think twice. Ultimately, though, President George H.W. Bush pardoned him. But why was he lying to Congress?

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, he was lying to cover up the fact that the Reagan administration had an operation, which he was part of, an operation led by **Oliver North**, to supply arms to the U.S.-created Nicaraguan Contras to commit aggression against Nicaragua, to invade Nicaragua and go after those soft targets, what the U.S. General Galvin described as “soft targets.” But they were doing that illegally at the time, because Congress had prohibited the U.S. from doing that, but the Reagan administration and Abrams and his colleagues just decided to ignore the legal mandate of Congress and go underground. And in order to go underground, they decided to get much of their money from, of all places, **Iran**, which was a harsh declared U.S. enemy at the time. And they traded—they did a complex deal where they got arms from—**they got money from Iran, from providing—letting arms flow. They used that to ship to the Contras,** and the Contras were able to continue their atrocities. And they eventually succeeded. The Contras eventually succeeded in temporarily bringing down the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

But—and this is a very interesting point, I think very relevant today with the Mueller investigation—what Abrams was charged with and pled guilty to was the most trivial aspect of both the Contra operation and the whole U.S. policy in Central America, which he was the brains behind, essentially. The most trivial aspect, just the fact that he lied to Congress, trying to cover up some money transactions. **He was never charged by the U.S. prosecutors with providing weapons to terrorists,** which is what the Salvadoran army and the Guatemalan army and the CIA-backed, U.S.-created Contras were behaving as, at the time, terrorists—i.e. those who kill and torture civilians for political purposes. He was not charged with that. **He was not charged with abetting crimes against humanity or genocide**. Just with the most trivial aspect, because that’s the way systems work, particularly the U.S. system. The crimes that are too big, too enormous, too much of a threat to the survival of the system itself, like the support of genocides overseas, cannot be charged. But if you commit a more petty offense, God help you, you could be in real trouble.

And that seems to be the fix that some of the Trump people are in right now, getting charged with lying to the Mueller investigation, **usually on rather small points compared to the bigger things that Trump is currently doing, like snatching children from their parents at the Mexican border, increasing the pace of bombing, and thereby civilian killings, in Iraq and Syria and Afghanistan, and a whole host of other things.**

And Abrams, by the way, also perhaps relevant to what’s going on today, was later pardoned by Bush. And the person who was pushing that was Barr, at that time the attorney general and now Trump’s incoming attorney general. But again, Abrams, although he pled guilty to the technicality of lying, he has yet to face real justice, just as the U.S. generals and presidents, like President—in this case, we’re talking about Central America, especially President Reagan. Reagan never faced justice, and Abrams has yet to face it, but they should.

Why can’t the U.S. become as civilized as Guatemala? Guatemala succeeded in mounting a genocide trial against General Ríos Montt, their former dictator, the general who was the key figure in the massacres. They convicted him the first time. They sentenced him to 80 years. The oligarchy demanded that the verdict be rolled back. It was rolled back. Then the trial was restarted from the halfway point. Ríos Montt, by that time, had died. But the renewed trial still brought back a verdict saying that the army had committed genocide in accord with U.S. interests.

And this is done in the context of a deeply corrupt Guatemalan government that is, at that moment, trying to amend the laws of Guatemala so that all the convicted war criminals can be freed from jail. With the support of President Trump at this moment and with key outside support from President Netanyahu of Israel, who is lobbying the Trump administration on their behalf, and with Mike Pence acting as the point man, the current Guatemalan government is trying not only to free the war criminals from jail, but also to shut down all of the prosecutors within Guatemala, some of them U.N.-backed prosecutors with an institution called CICIG, who have been prosecuting **President Morales of Guatemala** himself and other oligarchs and military people for corruption. They’re trying to throw the—in some cases, throw the prosecutors out of the country; in other cases, fire them; and in all cases, strip away their police protection so they are standing there defenseless in the face of the mafias and drug dealers and corrupt politicians and oligarchs they’re trying to prosecute—all of this now being backed by Trump.

And it’s in that kind of political context that the brave survivors of the Abrams-backed atrocities in Guatemala, the handful of honest attorneys and prosecutors and judges in Guatemala, were able to achieve the political miracle of mounting these genocide and crimes against humanity trials and actually convicting a number of and jailing a number of high-level officials. So, if they can do that in Guatemala, why can’t we do that here in the United States? Why can’t we at least aspire to that level of courage and political consciousness and civilization?

I remember, as the verdict against General Ríos Montt was being read—I was in the courtroom—I was thinking, “My god, imagine if this were done in the United States. Imagine a trial in Texas of Bush Jr. for Iraq, or of Obama for the drone killings, or for a figure like Elliott Abrams for Guatemala and El Salvador, and other cases.” And it really was inconceivable in the current political moment in the United States. But I think we’ll get there. And we should take the example of the courageous survivors and lawyers of Guatemala.