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A bombshell new investigation from *The Intercept* reveals that former U.S. national security adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was responsible for even more civilian deaths during the U.S. war in Cambodia than was previously known. The revelations add to a violent résumé that ranges from Latin America to Southeast Asia, where Kissinger presided over brutal U.S. military interventions to put down communist revolt and to develop U.S. influence around the world. While survivors and family members of these deadly campaigns continue to grieve, Kissinger celebrates his 100th birthday this week. “This adds to the list of killings and crimes that Henry Kissinger should, even at this very late date in his life, be asked to answer for,” says *The Intercept*’s Nick Turse, author of the new investigation, “Kissinger’s Killing Fields.” We also speak with Yale University’s Greg Grandin, author of *Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman*.

AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!*, [democracynow.org](#), *The War and Peace Report*. I’m Amy Goodman, with Juan González.

Saturday will be the 100th birthday of Henry Kissinger. He served as national security adviser and secretary of state in the Nixon and Ford administrations. Today we look at Kissinger’s ongoing influence on the national security state as the United States engages in declared and undeclared wars around the world. Human rights advocates consider Kissinger a war criminal who has escaped accountability.

We begin with a damning new [investigation](#) by *The Intercept* on the secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia that killed as many as 150,000 civilians, that Kissinger authorized during the U.S. War in Vietnam. Reporter Nick Turse has revealed unreported mass killings, after examining formerly classified U.S. military documents and traveling to 12 remote Cambodian villages to interview more than 75 witnesses and survivors of the U.S. attacks. With this new piece, Nick Turse also publishes transcripts of Kissinger’s phone calls that show his key role in Cambodia, and CIA records connecting Kissinger’s actions to the growth of Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge, the regime that massacred 2 million people from 1975 to 1979.

Nick Turse is a contributing writer for *The Intercept*. His books include *Kill Anything That*

Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam

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[story](#)

is headlined “Blood on His Hands: Survivors of Kissinger’s Secret War in Cambodia Reveal Unreported Mass Killings.”

Nick Turse, welcome back to *Democracy Now!*

NICK TURSE: Thank you.

AMY GOODMAN: Why don’t you lay out the scope of your investigation and its most stunning conclusions, what you were most shocked by in this extensive report?

NICK TURSE: Thank you so much for having me on.

You know, I think the key takeaway of this package of articles is that Henry Kissinger is responsible for more civilian deaths in Cambodia than was previously known, according to this exclusive archive of U.S. military documents that I assembled and also interviews with Cambodian witnesses and survivors, as well as Americans who witnessed or took part in these attacks. The archive offers previously unpublished, unreported and also underappreciated evidence of hundreds of civilian casualties that were kept secret during the U.S. war in Cambodia, most of them from 1969 to 1973, the years that Henry Kissinger presided over it, and these remain almost entirely unknown to the American people today.

A key to this reporting was previously unpublished interviews with more than 75 Cambodian witnesses and survivors of U.S. military attacks. And speaking with them revealed new details about the long-term trauma borne by survivors of the American war there. So, taken together, this adds to the list of killings and crimes that Henry Kissinger should, even at this very late date in his life, be asked to answer for.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Nick, could you talk a little bit about the military documents you found? In your articles, I was quite surprised to discover, although I guess it’s been reported

previously, that Kissinger himself was taping or transcribing conversations that he had with the president and other officials about the war in Cambodia.

NICK TURSE: Yes, that's right. I wrote a short sidebar about this. People know about Nixon's White House taping. What really laid him low is in the Watergate scandal. But most people don't realize that Kissinger was also taping all his phone conversations. And he had a group of aides that transcribed these.

And through these transcripts, you can see Kissinger's — you know, how hands-on he was with his policies in Cambodia, and you can see him relaying orders from Nixon. You know, some White House officials that I spoke with, who were privy to these conversations at the time, were often worried that President Nixon was drunk during some of these conversations. He was slurring his words, and giving orders to, in one case that I focus on, attack anything — or, it was to send anything that flies on anything that moves in Cambodia — basically, attack everything with planes and helicopter gunships. And you can see the order come right from Nixon, Nixon pass it down to his military aide, Alexander Haig.

And then I was able to show that you could see the palpable effects in the field, that just after these orders came down, helicopter attacks on Cambodia went sky high. They tripled over the course of the month after this call. So, you can really see the direct effects of Kissinger in the White House and how it affected Cambodians on the ground.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to start with your article — how you start your [article](#), in Cambodia. “At the end of a dusty path snaking through rice paddies lives a woman who survived multiple U.S. airstrikes as a child. Round-faced and just over 5 feet tall in plastic sandals, Meas Lorn lost an older brother to a helicopter gunship attack and an uncle and cousins to artillery fire. For decades, one question haunted her: 'I still wonder why those aircraft always attacked in this area. Why did they drop bombs here?’”

Can you elaborate on this? And I want to say for our radio listeners, for television, we're showing photographs that you have, an incredible goldmine of photographs that you took when you made these visits. Talk about these details, the specific stories.

NICK TURSE: Yes. You know, Meas Lorn's story and the suffering that she endured, the

trauma that she's lived with all these years, it, like so many of the stories that I heard in Cambodia, really, really stuck with me. And her question was one that I heard again and again. Cambodian villagers in these remote villages on the border with Vietnam, they had no idea why they were attacked. One day, American aircraft just started appearing overhead. They had no frame of reference for why this was happening. They didn't understand it. But they soon came to fear these machines. And for years on end, they were terrorized by them.

I actually took her question to Henry Kissinger, when I tried to confront him with questions for this article. And I asked him to answer the question that she had asked me: Why did they attack here? And Kissinger responded with sarcasm, anger, and stomped off. You know, he was able to beat an easy retreat and save himself from this questioning, but Cambodians like Meas Lorn, you know, didn't have any sort of easy means of escape.

You know, there was another village that I visited, and I have some photographs from that, as well. These were taken by my wife, Tam Turse, who reported this along with me. And there was a village that was mentioned in U.S. documents. They mention an attack on May 1st, 1970. A helicopter circled a Cambodian village. The Americans had a phonetic spelling of it, called "Moroan," but there was no village in Cambodia called "Moroan." It's not a Cambodian name. But there was one called Mroan, on the border. And we set about trying to find it. We got close. We spent two days driving around local roads asking for directions. We finally turned off the highway onto a red dirt track that cut through some lush farmland. It dead-ended with a footpath, and it took us into this village.

I quickly found the village chief, and I read him the excerpt from the documents, that during this attack, 12 villagers were killed, five were wounded. This is from U.S. records. And after the assault, survivors fled their village, it said, and they went to another one called Kantuot. So, when I asked him about this particular attack, it was like many Cambodian villages that I visited: He was baffled by it. They had endured so many airstrikes over the years, he couldn't remember one single strike. But when he thought about the date, he told me, "That's right." He gestured toward an area at the edge of the village and said, "They attacked intensely at that time, and then everyone here fled for Kantuot." So I knew that we had the right place.

And this village chief, a man named Sheang Heng, lost his mother, his father, his grandfather, a nephew, a niece and other more distant relatives to airstrikes. He and several other survivors told me about relentless attacks. And as he talked to me, his eyes reddened, and then they went vacant. And, you know, he sunk to his knees and moved to a far corner of the room. And, you know, it — you know, I let him be. He eventually returned to the conversation. But this was the type of trauma that I encountered again and again. It had been decades, but this trauma,

wrought by Henry Kissinger's policies, was still so amazingly fresh and palpable in all of these villages.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Nick, the U.S. bombing campaign and the war in Cambodia was followed, obviously, by the rise of the Khmer Rouge and also the genocide that the rest of the world associates more with Cambodia than anything else. I'm wondering, your reporting — what connection, if any, between this bombing, this massive bombing campaign, for which U.S. officials have never been held responsible, and the rise of the Khmer Rouge?

NICK TURSE: Sure. I mean, of course, the Khmer Rouge is culpable for the genocide in Cambodia and the 2 million deaths. But as you mentioned, it's been long overlooked just how destabilizing the U.S. bombing was. There was such displacement of Cambodians within their own country, such trauma caused by the U.S. attacks, these relentless attacks, and tremendous quantities of bombs dropped, that the Khmer Rouge used all this as a recruiting tool. They went around to villages and said that the only way to make this stop was to join their movement, which before the U.S. bombing was really a small fringe movement of just thousands of people. By the end of the U.S. bombing, the Khmer Rouge numbered 200,000 people. And, I mean, the U.S. attacks were the centerpiece of their recruiting drive. And, you know, unfortunately, it worked all too well. And so, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger certainly played a key role in enabling this genocide to happen.

AMY GOODMAN: In 2016, during an event at the LBJ Library, Henry Kissinger was asked to respond to those who call him a war criminal.

HENRY KISSINGER: I think the word "war criminal" should not be thrown around in the domestic debate. It's a shameful — it's a reflection on the people who use it.

AMY GOODMAN: As Henry Kissinger turns 100 years old on Saturday, in addition to Nick Turse, who has written this astounding [series](#) in *The Intercept* headlined "Blood on His Hands," we're joined by the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Greg Grandin, author of the book *Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman*. Greg's latest [article](#) is headlined "Henry Kissinger, War Criminal—Still at Large at 100." Can you take off from

where Nick Turse left off, Greg Grandin, and tell us how, though so many have come under a microscope, like Nixon and his whole group in the White House, Kissinger somehow escaped this by the establishment media, though independent media has long been fiercely critical of him? Tell us Kissinger's full story, Greg.

GREG GRANDIN: Well, it would take a lot more time than we have to tell Kissinger's full story. He's turning 100 years old. I think that what's interesting is that — I mean, Kissinger is a war criminal, but there are lots of war criminals. I mean, the people who conducted the, as Jeff Sachs talked about, Iraq War could be held culpable for the destruction of a country in an illegal war. What's interesting is that, in some ways, the crimes are ongoing. I mean, you know, there's just many, many unexploded ordnances in Laos and Cambodia that are still killing people. So, the crimes are, well, not of the past, but they are the present.

That said, I think that the best way to think about Kissinger isn't necessarily as a war criminal. I think that, in some ways, that shuts down the debate. Kissinger, as a personality, is so oversized, he eclipses his context. I think Kissinger's — Kissinger's life, actually, has a lot to teach us about how we got to the point where we are, that way that — again, Jeff Sachs talked about this, this multifronted, never-ending, endless war and military-industrial complex.

Now, Cambodia, the bombing of Cambodia was done in secret for five years. It was a covert operation. People know that, but I don't think it was mentioned. And the reason it had to be covert was because it was illegal. It was illegal to bomb. We weren't at war with Cambodia. It wasn't a — it wasn't a country that the United States had declared war on or was at war with. And the reasons why, the excuses that Kissinger has given for a five-year-long bombing campaign that caused enormous damage, including bringing to power the most eliminationist, extremist cadre within the Kher Rouge and leading to the genocide, was that it had — it was to eliminate safe havens, that it was an act of self-defense.

This is now taken as a common practice. This is, basically, fundamentally, what the entire U.S. "war on terror" is authorized to do, to go into any country and drone and bomb and conduct military operations — some we know about, some we don't about, but as a matter of course. So we don't do it in secret. So, Kissinger's trajectory, from Cambodia, from being the architect of this secret campaign to bomb a country the United States wasn't at war with, to the state we are in now, governed by a national security state, is what I think is most instructive about Kissinger's life and most important about him, other than describing him as a war criminal, which he is.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Greg, why do you think that he remains such a significant figure? As you mentioned, he escaped all of the scandal of the Nixon years and went on to be a highly influential figure not only in the actual political world, but, obviously, in the media, as well. He was always referred — almost, by the corporate press, as a revered figure in American foreign policy and national security.

GREG GRANDIN: Yeah, the press loved him. And he was very good at playing the press, especially — he was very good at weathering Watergate. His fingers were all over — he basically pushed Nixon to set up the Plumbers, because he was obsessed that Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon Papers, had information about Cambodia. Cambodia threads through all of this. And Kissinger was instrumental in pushing Nixon to set up the covert operation that went into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office and went into the Watergate Hotel, because he was — he wanted to basically take down Ellsberg.

And Kissinger survived that, basically because he wasn't — he wasn't a — he didn't seem like the thugs that Nixon had around him. You know, Haldeman and Ehrlichman were the — the Prussians, they were called. And the press really kind of fell for the gravitas that he projected. And they were looking for somebody that they could trust, that they can hang something on and still have faith in the national — in the institution of the presidency, the executive branch. And Kissinger was very attuned to this. He played people like Ted Koppel very well.

And then, what's interesting about Kissinger, though, more than anything — we know about his eight years in office. He was national security director and secretary of state under Nixon and Ford for a full eight years, secretary of state for the last couple of those years. And we know. We have documents. We have — you know, Kissinger himself has released, has declassified, has given his archive to Yale. But it's what happened after, when he becomes a kind of sage pundit, a bipartisan pundit. Bill Clinton rehabilitates Kissinger as a way of giving him a certain seriousness in foreign policy, that as a governor of Arkansas he didn't have. So he rehabilitates him for the Democratic Party.

And then Kissinger founds, of course, Kissinger Associates. And so, he's out of office now for what? '76 to now is, you know, a half a — 50 years. And during that time, Kissinger Associates has been a kind of premier concierge service for the global elite. It's brokered — it basically brokered the privatization of national industries in Latin America, in Eastern Europe, in Russia. He's a key player in all of these movements. We have no information about any of that, right? And it's arguably more consequential, in some ways. I mean, maybe not. Maybe — I guess the actual war crimes were when he was in office for eight years. But there is this — there is this black hole of his role as a consultant to the global elite during this very consequential moment

in which an enormous amount of wealth transferred from the bottom to the top. And Kissinger was deeply involved in that.

He helped broker NAFTA, for example. He told Clinton that Clinton had political capital to do only one of two things his first year: He could either pass Hillary Clinton's national health program, or he could push for NAFTA. And he advised him to push for NAFTA, and Clinton did. And we got NAFTA, and we didn't get a healthcare expansion, which I think says a lot about the post-Cold War trajectory of the United States and how we got to where we are now.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go quickly to the 2016 Democratic presidential debate in Milwaukee, when Senator Bernie Sanders criticized his opponent Hillary Clinton's relationship with her fellow former secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, and cited Kissinger's role in Cambodia.

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS: In her book and in this last debate, she talked about getting the approval or the support or the mentoring of Henry Kissinger. Now, I find it rather amazing, because I happen to believe that Henry Kissinger was one of the most destructive secretaries of state in the modern history of this country. I am proud to say that Henry Kissinger is not my friend. I will not take advice from Henry Kissinger.

And, in fact, Kissinger's actions in Cambodia, when the United States bombed that country, overthrew Prince Sihanouk, created the instability for Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge to come in, who then butchered some 3 million innocent people — one of the worst genocides in the history of the world. So, count me in as somebody who will not be listening to Henry Kissinger.

AMY GOODMAN: So, that was presidential candidate Bernie Sanders versus presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. And then you have the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, who once said, "Once you've been to Cambodia, you'll never stop wanting to beat Henry Kissinger to death with your bare hands. You will never again be able to open a newspaper and read about that treacherous, prevaricating, murderous scumbag sitting down for a nice chat with Charlie Rose or attending some black-tie affair for a new glossy magazine without choking. Witness what Henry did in Cambodia — the fruits of his genius for statesmanship — and you

will never understand why he's not sitting in the dock at The Hague next to Milosevic." Now, those were the words of Anthony Bourdain. And I want to get your comment on this, Greg, and then Nick Turse.

GREG GRANDIN: Yeah. Well, again, Cambodia, the centrality of Cambodia in this transition, transitional period of the U.S. national security state, and its importance, you know, the human damage and costs and pain and suffering is overwhelming to think about.

But more kind of stepping back and thinking about its role in the kind of trajectory of U.S. power, one thing we didn't talk about is Kissinger's role in the October Surprise of 1968. *The New York Times* just ran an article more or less confirming Reagan's role in the October Surprise regarding the Iranian hostages. But Kissinger — you know, Kissinger in the 1950s and '60s was a Rockefeller Republican. He understood himself as a liberal Republican. And he was shocked when Nixon got the nomination in 1968. He thought his political career was over. But then he reached out to the Nixon campaign, and he said, "You know, I've got contacts in the Johnson campaign, and I can let you know what's going on with the peace talks in Paris," that were hoping to wind down the war and might have given Humphrey the presidency. And Kissinger passed on information that the Nixon campaign then used to scuttle those talks.

And then, once he was appointed — he was awarded with that by being appointed national security adviser. And then, once he came into office, he had to figure out a way to restart the peace talks, because Nixon promised to end the war. So, what can you do? You just scuttled the peace talks. How do you restart them? Well, one of the — not the stated justifications, but one of the reasons why he started bombing Cambodia and became obsessed about Cambodia was he was trying to kind of project a certain kind of madman theory to the North Vietnamese, that the Nixon administration was so crazy, they would start bombing Cambodia, and maybe this would bring them back to the negotiating tables. And, of course, it didn't, and the war dragged out for another five years for no reason. It could have ended in 1968. It could have — and then millions of lives were lost, the Vietnamese, tens of thousands of lives lost, the United States, all as a result of this moment, this first October Surprise in 1968 — and again, Cambodia playing a central role in that history.

AMY GOODMAN: And, Nick Turse, we just have a minute, and we want to give you the last word, after this massive investigation you've done and documents you've uncovered and people's voices that haven't been heard before.

NICK TURSE: Yes, and I want to bring it back to the Anthony Bourdain quote and just offer up one case that I chronicle. And this is from the U.S. records.

Americans shot up a village with helicopters using machine-gun fire, rockets. And then South Vietnamese forces, an American officer landed. They began looting this village. An American officer stole a Suzuki motorbike and hauled it onto his helicopter. Other Americans noticed that there was a young Cambodian girl, maybe 5 years old, who was shot and bleeding, lying on the ground. They wanted to take her for medical care, but the officer who dragged the motorbike on board said, “Negative.” They were weighed down by the bike, and they had no room. And they left this girl there to die.

This happened after Henry Kissinger gave that order, to “anything that flies on anything that moves.” So this is Henry Kissinger’s legacy. And this is what Anthony Bourdain was talking about.

AMY GOODMAN: *Intercept* reporter Nick Turse, we’ll link to your [four-part series](#), including the [piece](#) “Blood on His Hands: Survivors of Kissinger’s Secret War in Cambodia Reveal Unreported Mass Killings.” And we want to thank Yale University professor Greg Grandin, author of the book *Kissinger’s Shadow*. We’ll link to your new [article](#), “Henry Kissinger, War Criminal—Still at Large at 100.” I’m Amy Goodman, with Juan González.