

Tell us about a whistleblower who has inspired you

“I didn’t set out to be a whistleblower,” said Katherine Gun in an interview with the Washington Post.¹

Sixteen years ago, Katharine Gun, a British Intelligence Specialist, received a top-secret memo from U.S. authorities asking Great Britain to spy on six UN Security Council members. The intelligence collected was to be used as leverage to pass a resolution sanctioning war with Iraq. Instantly, Gun understood the gravity of the request. She was being asked to help blackmail the international community into war.²

“This was crossing a red line for me,” Gun said in an interview with Vice.³ “I immediately decided the public should know the lengths the Americans were going to in order to secure legitimacy for this war. I could tell this email was pretty explosive.”

Gun leaked the memo to the *Observer*, with the hope that evidence of blackmail and spying could stop the war. Once the *Observer* published the memo, Gun “immediately felt like [she] was in danger.”⁴ After she was questioned by Government Communications Head Quarters (GCHQ) and admitted to leaking the document, Gun was arrested for violating Britain’s Official Secrets Act.⁵

She was charged and to be tried at the High Court, facing jail time and a criminal record. Gun’s legal team fought the charges with a defense that threatened to put the war itself on trial, and the case was eventually dropped.⁶ But she did not leave the event unscathed. She lost her career as an intelligence specialist.⁷ Her home was searched by authorities.⁸ The government attempted to deport her husband.⁹ She struggled with PTSD for years after the incident.¹⁰

Gun epitomizes what it means to be a whistleblower. She spoke up not for attention, fame or wealth. She spoke up despite the risk it posed to her career, to her family and to her freedom. She spoke up because

¹ Floyd, Thomas. “Official Secrets’ Sheds Light on the Story of U.K. Whistleblower Katharine Gun,” September 6, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/express/2019/09/05/official-secrets-sheds-light-story-uk-whistleblower-katharine-gun/>.

² Bethell, Chris, and Michael Segalov. “This British Spy Exposed a Devious US Plot to Justify the Iraq War.” Vice, October 15, 2019. https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/ne8997/official-secrets-true-story-katharine-gun-iraq; Adams, Tim. “Iraq War Whistleblower Katharine Gun: ‘Truth Always Matters.’” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, September 22, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/sep/22/katharine-gun-whistleblower-iraq-official-secrets-film-keira-knightley>.

³ Bethell, Chris, and Michael Segalov. “This British Spy Exposed a Devious US Plot to Justify the Iraq War.” Vice, October 15, 2019. https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/ne8997/official-secrets-true-story-katharine-gun-iraq.

⁴ Bethell, Chris, and Michael Segalov. “This British Spy Exposed a Devious US Plot to Justify the Iraq War.” Vice, October 15, 2019. https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/ne8997/official-secrets-true-story-katharine-gun-iraq.

⁵ Adams, Tim. “Iraq War Whistleblower Katharine Gun: ‘Truth Always Matters.’” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, September 22, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/sep/22/katharine-gun-whistleblower-iraq-official-secrets-film-keira-knightley>.

⁶ Bethell, Chris, and Michael Segalov. “This British Spy Exposed a Devious US Plot to Justify the Iraq War.” Vice, October 15, 2019. https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/ne8997/official-secrets-true-story-katharine-gun-iraq.

⁷ Adams, Tim. “Iraq War Whistleblower Katharine Gun: ‘Truth Always Matters.’” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, September 22, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/sep/22/katharine-gun-whistleblower-iraq-official-secrets-film-keira-knightley>.

⁸ Bethell, Chris, and Michael Segalov. “This British Spy Exposed a Devious US Plot to Justify the Iraq War.” Vice, October 15, 2019. https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/ne8997/official-secrets-true-story-katharine-gun-iraq,

⁹ Adams, Tim. “Iraq War Whistleblower Katharine Gun: ‘Truth Always Matters.’” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, September 22, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/sep/22/katharine-gun-whistleblower-iraq-official-secrets-film-keira-knightley>.

¹⁰ Miller, Julie. “How a Real-Life Spy Tried to Stop the Iraq War.” Vanity Fair. Vanity Fair, August 30, 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/08/keira-knightley-official-secrets-katharine-gun-interview>.

she believed she was standing for what is just. She acted with courage to challenge the status quo, refusing to compromise her morals to follow orders. While she could have easily ignored the memo like many of her colleagues, she risked it all to do the hard thing, the right thing.

As I embark on my journey to pursue a career in law, Gun's actions resonate with me deeply. While I have had a successful career as a senior economist at a prestigious consulting firm, I am now shifting to a profession that will allow me to advocate for justice, to serve the public, and to act as a voice for those without the resources to stand for themselves. My own deeply personal experiences with social injustice have played a major role in my decision to become an attorney. I married interracially, for instance, in Virginia, a state that only 50 years prior had laws preventing my husband and I from doing just that. The constant prospect of discrimination for my younger brother, a gay Pakistani Muslim living in the Midwest, is all too real. Calls for a "Muslim ban" in the United States cause me grave concern for my parents, who routinely travel to Pakistan to visit family. In light of these injustices, Katherine Gun is evidence that rules and regulations can be imperfect, and when they encroach on liberties, they must be challenged. She is a clear reminder of why I chose to pursue this profession and has helped shape what I hope to accomplish as a future attorney.

Although Gun didn't set out to be a whistleblower, her courage and willingness to challenge authority speak for themselves. To me, she's not only a whistleblower in the truest sense, but she is a living example of the power one woman can have when she challenges authority, upholds her morals, and stands up for justice.