

# Stanley Weiss, executive who founded group monitoring defense spending, dies at 94

By [Matt Schudel](#)

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Stanley A. Weiss, who went to Mexico as a prospector in the early 1950s, became wealthy as a mining executive and later founded a Washington-based business group to monitor wasteful defense spending and develop long-range national security plans, died Aug. 26 at his home in London. He was 94.

The cause was cancer, said his son, Anthony Weiss.

Mr. Weiss, a self-described “skinny Jewish kid from South Philadelphia,” had an adventurous, even rakish life, most notably when he left Georgetown University and moved to Mexico after seeing the Humphrey Bogart gold-prospecting movie “[The Treasure of the Sierra Madre](#).”

He didn’t speak Spanish and knew nothing about mining but dug into the hills with a pickax to seek his fortune. He never struck gold and struggled for several years before finding another mineral, manganese.

Mr. Weiss said he could recognize a seam of manganese in the earth by its color and smell — and because there were usually colonies of ants nearby. Another thing he learned in the Mexican mining towns was always to walk away from a fight.

“If you won,” he wrote in a 2017 memoir, “the brother of the guy you beat up would come after you and kill you.”

Manganese proved to be a key element in producing metal alloys, and by 1960, Mr. Weiss and a business partner had founded American Minerals, a mining and mineral processing company. Mr. Weiss said he had a hard time describing his business to his mother.

“She thought I was selling magazines, not manganese,” he told the Baltimore Sun in 1992. “Few had heard of it.”

His company later merged with another to form American Premier, which became a major supplier and processor of such products as mercury, chemicals, magnesium used in Epsom salts and minerals for glazing tiles.

In the 1960s, Mr. Weiss teamed with Turkish-American businessman Ara Oztemel to import chromium and other metals from the Soviet Union to the United States. At a time when Cold War trade between the countries was unusual, Mr. Weiss often traveled from his home in Mexico City to Moscow for Oztemel’s Satra Corp. (Soviet-American Trading), which reportedly controlled 80 percent of Soviet imports to the United States.

Mr. Weiss settled in London in 1971 and began to develop an interest in public service. At the suggestion of a friend, economist and diplomat John Kenneth Galbraith, he spent a year as a fellow at Harvard University’s Center for International Affairs, a foreign policy research center.

In 1978, Mr. Weiss helped found the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, which seeks to reduce the role of nuclear power in the world. A year later, he helped found the Citizens Party, a short-lived effort to build an alternative to the Republican and Democratic political parties.

Mr. Weiss then sought to blend his interests in government policy and business by launching Business Executives for National Security (BENS) in 1982. The nonprofit, made up of business leaders, offers advice and research to the Pentagon and other federal officials concerned with defense spending, cybersecurity and planning for national emergencies.

Asked on NBC's "Today" Show in 1983 why corporate executives should involve themselves in defense matters and preventing nuclear war, Mr. Weiss replied, "Being dead is bad for business." (The phrase became the title of his memoir.)

He and his group sought to draw attention to bloated defense budgets, caused in large part by overspending by contractors and duplicated efforts. Mr. Weiss recommended that ineffective and costly weapons systems be eliminated and called for the closing of unneeded military bases around the country.

"All too often, the Congress and the Pentagon are not sufficiently focused on defense, but rather on pork, parochialism and promotions," Mr. Weiss told the Dallas Morning News in 1989. "We've simply tried to bring business sense to the business of defense."

Stanley Alan Weiss was born Dec. 21, 1926, in Philadelphia. His father was a lawyer, his mother a homemaker.

He joined the Army at 17 during World War II and was preparing to join a planned Allied invasion of Japan when the war ended. Afterward, he started his first business, selling surplus Army supplies and scrap metal.

Mr. Weiss attended several colleges, including Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, the old Pennsylvania Military College and what is now the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

A week after he saw "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" in 1951, he left Georgetown and was in his car driving to Mexico.

Over the years, Mr. Weiss wrote in his memoir, he developed friendships with an eclectic group of people that included Mexican artists and writers, actor Richard Burton and three actors who played James Bond on film: Sean Connery, Roger Moore and Pierce Brosnan.

Mr. Weiss's company merged several times with other firms, and he retired from day-to-day management in the late 1990s. He invested in other businesses, including venture capital firms, and had homes in Washington and Switzerland, in addition to London.

Survivors include his wife of 63 years, the former Lisa Popper of London; two children, Christina Weiss Lurie and Anthony Weiss, both of New York City; a sister; and five grandchildren.

Through his work with BENS and his widespread travels, Mr. Weiss began to write on foreign policy and international business and for many years was a regular contributor to the International Herald Tribune and HuffPost. He was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and served on the board of Georgetown's Walsh School of Foreign Service, among other boards and advisory panels.

Mr. Weiss stepped down as chairman of BENS when he was 80 but remained active with the group and his varied business interests until his death. When he was 65, he was asked how he managed to devote attention to so many projects. He joked that BENS took up 70 percent of his time, and business took up the remaining 60 percent.

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