Thank You to Our Readers

From Journalist Robert Parry: We did come up short on our year-end fund drive, raising just 40 percent of our $25,000 goal. But I want to thank the readers who were able to contribute. It remains my view that information is the key to resolving the world’s many pressing problems and

Financing the hard work that goes into unearthing that information and presenting it in a highly readable form is an essential part of that problem-solving.

So, anyone who still wishes to help us meet our financial needs, click here to make a credit-card donation through the Consortiumnews.com Web site. Or send a check to: Consortium for Independent Journalism (CIJ); 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231; Arlington VA 22201. To use PayPal, our account is named after our e-mail address: “consortnew @ aol.com”

We are a tax-exempt 501-c-3 organization, so your donation can be tax-deductible. Also, if you have made a donation and would like a signed gift copy of my new book, America’s Stolen Narrative, as a token of our appreciation, just ask.

Thank you again for your support.

Robert Parry

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 as the Internet’s first investigative magazine. He saw it as a way to combine modern technology and old-fashioned journalism to counter the increasing triviality of the mainstream U.S. news media.

Post-Iraq-War US Intel Chief Praised

After the U.S. intelligence community caved in to political pressure on Iraq’s non-existent WMD, Thomas Fingar restored professionalism that poured cold water on the neocons’ rush to war with Iran. That has now earned the former Director of the National Intelligence Council an award for integrity, reports ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern
Thomas Fingar, former Director of the National Intelligence Council, will receive the annual award from Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence in recognition of Fingar’s work from 2005 to 2008 restoring respect for the battered discipline of U.S. intelligence analysis after the fraudulent assessments on Iraq’s non-existent WMD.

In 2007, as chief of intelligence analysis, Fingar managed a thoroughly professional and unsparingly honest National Intelligence Estimate on the live-wire issue of Iran’s nuclear program. That NIE was instrumental in thwarting plans by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney to attack Iran before they left office.

At the time, it was widely believed in the Official Washington that Tehran was developing a nuclear weapon but, as a seasoned intelligence professional, Fingar was allergic to “group think.” He recruited the best experts and ordered an empirical, bottom-up approach to the evidence. And, as luck would have it, some critical new intelligence became available in 2007 during the drafting.

Thus, in the Iran NIE of early November 2007, all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies judged “with high confidence” that Iran had halted its nuclear weapon design and weaponization work in 2003. That key judgment has been revalidated in testimony to Congress every year since.

Fingar, now a professor at Stanford, is teaching in its overseas program at Oxford in the United Kingdom. The award named for the late CIA analyst Sam Adams who challenged the U.S. military’s overly optimistic claims about Vietcong and North Vietnamese troop strength during the Vietnam War will be presented to Fingar at the historic Oxford Union.

Discussing his upcoming award with Sam Adams Associates, Fingar showed little patience with the nonsensical charges that he and his analysts had to endure after the NIE on Iran hit the streets. He reminded us:

“The whole purpose was to provide as accurate and objective a picture of what we knew at the time. To have done otherwise would have been unprofessional and inconsistent with the reason we have an intelligence establishment.

“Every other characterization of security-related affairs provided to decision makers has, or is assumed to have, a policy agenda. The Intelligence Community exists not just to provide analyses based on ‘all’ the information available to others plus, when it can get it, information not available to others but also, and more importantly, to assemble and assess the information as objectively as possible.

“The job of the Intelligence Community is to help decision makers to make
better-informed decisions. It most emphatically is not to lead or pressure them to decide issues in a particular way. ... It is also the reason we spend billions of dollars on intelligence analysis. ... In a fundamental way, we were simply ‘doing our jobs’ when we produced the Iran NIE.

“Those who did not like the conclusions knew or soon realized that they could not challenge our findings by disputing the existence or meaning of our evidence, so they pursued a different course. The ploy was completely transparent: allege that those who wrote the NIE were intelligence amateurs who had a political agenda, and claim that the alleged principal authors had been career-long opponents of President Bush.

“There are many ‘problems’ with this line of attack problems that were overlooked by a remarkable number of journalists. ... I didn’t write the NIE but, at the time, I had 37 years of intelligence experience probably no longer an amateur.

“Neocon critics never explained why, if I had been a career-long opponent of George W. Bush, he had nominated me to be an assistant secretary of state, endorsed my selection as the first Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, and approved my selection to supervise preparation of materials for his daily briefing.”

**Blocking a Dash to War**

Without doubt, the NIE on Iran’s nuclear program made another rash decision to go to war in the Middle East untenable.

I myself have been involved in intelligence analysis for 50 years 27 at the CIA; two as an Army infantry/intelligence officer, and the rest as a close observer. Yet, the November 2007 NIE is the only one I know of that deserves unambiguous credit for stopping an unnecessary war, one that could have been even more disastrous than the Bush administration’s excellent adventure in Iraq.

Don’t take my word for it. In his memoir *Decision Points*, President George W. Bush acknowledged that the “eye-popping” findings of the 2007 NIE “tied my hands on the military side. ... After the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?

“I don’t know why the NIE was written the way it was ... I certainly hoped intelligence analysts weren’t trying to influence policy. Whatever the explanation, the NIE had a big impact and not a good one.”

As Bush’s comment made clear, intelligence analysts do not operate in a
political vacuum. The real professionals, however, construct a protective shield against political influence, bias and an understandable-but-anathema eagerness to please superiors in the White House.

When I tell Washington cognoscenti that this shielding can actually work, and that the debacle with “intelligence” on Iraq was the “Cheney/Bush exemption to the rule,” their eyes roll in disbelief. Everyone in Washington is perceived to have a political agenda. It takes guts for senior intelligence officials to avoid playing into that perception.

Perhaps President Bush and Vice President Cheney can be forgiven for assuming that all senior intelligence officials are as eager to politicize their work as were former CIA Director George Tenet, his deputy John McLaughlin, and the senior managers who had bubbled to the top with disastrous consequences for Iraq.

More than two decades had gone by since Director William Casey and his protégé, Robert Gates, began politicizing intelligence big-time. That is usually enough time to corrupt thoroughly any institution and that proved to be true for the CIA. However, after the Iraq WMD catastrophe, professionals like Fingar stepped in to begin righting the intelligence ship.

The November 2007 NIE landed like a dead fish on the White House doorstep, causing the neocons and other war hawks to challenge the unanimous judgment of all 16 intelligence agencies as naive. The drafters were pilloried with charges that they were soft on Iran and just trying to stop a war! But the deed was done; and we were spared another unnecessary bloodletting.

**Oxford Site for Award**

The Oxford Union will be hosting the *Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence* award ceremony on Jan. 23. The ceremony will feature several individuals well known in the field of intelligence and related topics, including an exclusive address via videolink from Julian Assange, who won the award in 2010.

The award is one of the few accolades for high-level whistleblowers who have taken risks to honor the public’s need to know. Also at the Oxford ceremony will be several previous Sam Adams awardees, including Coleen Rowley, Katharine Gun, Craig Murray, and Thomas Drake. The acceptance speech by Dr. Fingar will be followed by briefer remarks from a few previous Sam Adams awardees.

Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence was established in 2002 by colleagues and admirers of the late CIA intelligence analyst Sam Adams to recognize those who uphold his example as a model for those in intelligence who
would aspire to the courage to speak truth to power. In honoring Adams’s memory, SAAII confers an award each year to someone in intelligence or related work who exemplifies Sam Adam’s courage, persistence, and devotion to truth, no matter the consequences.

It was Adams who discovered in 1967 that there were more than a half-million Vietnamese Communists under arms. This was roughly twice the number that the U.S. command in Saigon would admit to, lest Americans learn that claims of “progress” were bogus. As proven later in court, Gen. William Westmoreland had simply limited the number Army intelligence was allowed to carry on its books. His deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams revealed the deception in a cable from Saigon:

A SECRET/EYES ONLY cable from Abrams on Aug. 20, 1967 stated: “We have been projecting an image of success over recent months,” and cautioned that if the higher figures became public, “all available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion.”

The Communist countrywide offensive during Tet (January/February 1968) made it clear that the generals had been lying and that Sam Adams’ higher figures were correct. Senior officials of the Washington Establishment were aware of the deception, but lacked the courage to stand up to Westmoreland. Sam Adams himself was too much a creature of the system to go “outside channels.”

A few weeks after Tet, however, Daniel Ellsberg rose to the occasion. Ellsberg learned that Westmoreland was asking for 206,000 more troops to widen the war into Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, right up to the border with China, and perhaps beyond. Someone (we still don’t know who) promptly leaked to the New York Times Westmoreland’s troop request, emboldening Ellsberg to do likewise with Sam Adams’ figures.

It was Ellsberg’s first unauthorized disclosure. He had come to the view that leaking truth about a deceitful war would be “a patriotic and constructive act.” On March 19, 1968, the Times published a stinging story based on Adams’s figures.

On March 25, President Johnson complained to a small group, “The leaks to the New York Times hurt us. ... We have no support for the war. This is caused by the 206,000 troop request and the leaks. I would have given Westy the 206,000 men.” On March 31, 1968, Johnson ordered a bombing pause, opted for negotiations, and announced that he would not run for another term in November.

Sam Adams continued to press for honesty but stayed “inside channels”, and failed. He died at 55 of a heart attack in 1988, nagged by the thought that, had
he gone to the media, thousands of lives might have been saved. His story is told in *War of Numbers*, published posthumously.

The annual Sam Adams Award has been given in previous years to truth tellers Coleen Rowley of the FBI; Katharine Gun of British Intelligence; Sibel Edmonds of the FBI; Craig Murray, former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan; Sam Provance; former US Army Sgt at Abu Ghraib; Maj. Frank Grevil of Danish Army Intelligence; Larry Wilkerson, Col., U.S. Army (ret.), former chief of staff to Colin Powell at State; Julian Assange of WikiLeaks; and (ex aequo) to Thomas Drake, former senior official of NSA and Jesselyn Radack, Director of National Security and Human Rights, Government Accountability Project.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. While serving as a senior CIA analyst (1963-1990), he chaired NIEs and prepared and briefed *The President’s Daily Brief*. He is a Sam Adams Associate, and serves on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

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**Hugo Chavez’s Lasting Legacy**

Venezuela’s charismatic and controversial President Hugo Chavez missed his scheduled inauguration as he battles cancer in a Cuban hospital. But Chavez’s political impact on the oil-rich country may outlive him as his socialist movement remains popular, one of his backers told Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

Eva Golinger is a Venezuelan-American attorney, journalist and former adviser to the Venezuelan Government. She is also the author of several books on Venezuela’s relationship with the United States, including *The Chávez Code* (2006), based on *Freedom of Information Act* documents that show links between U.S. government agencies and Venezuelan organizations trying to overthrow Chavez.

Golinger has worked closely with Chavez and traveled abroad with the recently reelected socialist president. She knows the inner working of the Chavez government like the back of her hand.

She remains a steadfast supporter of Chavez, but is a realist about his chances for returning as he battles cancer at a hospital in Havana, Cuba. She also knows a great deal about Vice President Nicolas Maduro, who is Chavez’s hand-picked
choice to follow him, in the event that Chavez doesn’t return to take the reins of power in oil-rich Venezuela.

In the following interview, Golinger talked about Chavez’s health, the politicking going on behind the scenes, even as Chavez clings to life, and a good deal about the next man, who may soon assume the reins of power.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you begin by giving us an update on President Chavez’s medical situation? What is it that is preventing Hugo Chavez from taking the oath of office?

EG: Well, President Chavez has been suffering from cancer in the pelvic region since June 2011, when it was first detected. He’s undergone surgeries already for the cancer to remove tumors and to deal with some of the complications. The last one was in early December. And he has since then had several complications, it was a very serious surgery that lasted over six hours.

He was already in a compromised state because he’d undergone extensive chemotherapy and radiation therapy treatment throughout the past year, as well as involving himself in a very intense presidential campaign, from about July 2012 through October, when he won the election, on October 7th.

So his immune system was pretty beat, his body was pretty worn. And he went into this surgery knowing that, which is why he held a televised broadcast to announce that he was going to have this surgery. In this televised broadcast, he had his Vice President, Nicolas Maduro, by his side as well as the President of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello.

For the first time ever, Chavez named Nicolas Maduro as his political successor. And said if he were not to make it through the surgery and be able to be sworn in for his new mandate in January, as well as continue on as President, in that case there would have to be new presidential elections. And he specifically said that his candidate is Nicolas Maduro, and he hoped that the Venezuelan people would vote for him.

So that, for many of us who know Chavez very well, is a clear sign that he’s not doing very well. And that he knew going into this surgery that there was a very high probability of the fact that he would not recover from it in any way that would enable him to be able to continue on as President of Venezuela.

But, there appears to be a lot of hope still that he will pull through and come out of it. We have to remember Chavez is only 58 and he’s very pro-active. He’s a very strong person. He’s overcome tremendous obstacles before. He was healthy before he was diagnosed with cancer, and began all these treatments.
So he’s in a different state, I mean, despite being compromised because of the chemotherapy and radiation treatment, besides that he was a healthy person. And so he’s young, I mean his organs are young. There’s still a very likely chance that he could recover. But at the same time there’s a chance that he could not.

So that’s the situation with President Chavez’s health. As it stands, he delegated much of his responsibilities to the vice president before he went into the surgery by law. His absence was not declared officially as being like absent from the presidency so that the vice president would be sworn in. He was granted an authorized leave from the country in order to undergo this treatment.

DB: Could you talk a little bit about the situation on the ground, what the role of the opposition is now. They are not quite sanguine with the decision to postpone the inauguration and there seems to be a lot of politics going on, on the ground. I assume that from the crowds in front of the palace in Venezuela, that Chavez is as popular as ever. How would you explain that situation now? The political situation.

EG: Okay, there is no question that Chavez is as popular as ever. And millions of people who voted for him, voted for him knowing that he had cancer. And they want him to continue as president and there’s a lot of hope in that. And I think that hope and faith in the fact that he can continue on as president, that people want him to be president, is what has brought millions into the streets [on the scheduled inauguration day], to celebrate Chavez, and to celebrate the continuation of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Now the Venezuelan constitution has a clause, in article 231, which is the article about the presidential inauguration that specifies a date, it says it should be January 10th of the first year of the new term. But it specifically says that in the event of a supervening circumstance, or an unforeseen circumstance that inauguration could take place before the supreme court. And a date is not specified.

So what went on was that Chavez’s cabinet and the vice president requested that the national assembly, Venezuelan’s parliament take into account that article and delay the inauguration until Chavez is able to come and be sworn in. And so that was then taken before the supreme court to decide whether it’s constitutional at this stage of events.

And the supreme court rendered a decision [on Jan. 9] saying that, yes, Chavez’s inauguration can be delayed under article 231. And as of right now, he has not been declared absent from the country so no one else can be sworn in as president, even temporarily.
The opposition, on the other hand, is saying, no, they’re rejecting that, they are saying “absolutely not. The constitution is not open to interpretation. He must be sworn in. In any event he’s absent from the country. So either the vice president had to take over or”… in this case, since it’s a new term starting, they are saying “it should be the president of the National Assembly” … who is a Chavez supporter, the issue is not that.

But it’s an attempt, one, to again, force Chavez from power under these sort of quasi constitutional means, and two, to try to create divisions amongst Chavismo. So a group of opposition legislators rejected the supreme court’s decision. And this type of thing happens only in Venezuela, the opposition have rejected and disobeyed the supreme court’s decision.

So now they are in complete disobedience of the law in the country. And they’ve called for a mass march to take place on January 23rd which is a historical date because it’s a date in 1958 that the dictatorship was overthrown, and so they are trying to say that what’s happening right now in the country is that a dictatorship is taking over.

They are calling for all kinds of unrest and instability to take place in the country to protest this. They are saying that there’s a power void/vacuum, no one’s in charge right now, there’s no government, no president. But, that’s not according to law, that’s not according to the supreme court’s decision which is the law, the supreme law of the land, and what the constitution says.

I think it’s important to add, I mean, it could seem like a strange situation for people outside of Venezuela, why would they not proceed as if Chavez were absent? Obviously he’s been absent for more than a month. No one has heard from him. He’s not capable, at this time, of communicating and that’s a clear reason many could see for him to be declared absent.

I think part of it is prayer and a hope that people have that he will recover, also if a decision were to be made to declare him absent, and then permanently absent, and the vice president were sworn in, or the president of the national assembly, new elections would have to be called. It would be an irreversible decision. So, I mean, Chavez is not at a stage, as of yet, that is irreversible.

I think that people, his supporters, his government, his party members are holding on to that issue, that he’s not in an irreversible state. That we cannot oust him from the presidency as of yet. You know that, it may happen, unfortunately, it might happen, but it may not.

And because of that unpredictability I think that his supporters are unwilling to take that leap and say that, you know, … people voted for him just a few
months ago. It’s been mandated, the will of the people of Venezuela. Fifty-five percent of voters, over 8 million people and so, you know, those who, right now, have to make decisions have said we are not going to override the decision of the people.

The opposition are calling for them to do just that. And, you know, many see this as, and I would say, it’s another attempt of the many and multiple, numerous attempts that they’ve made over these years since Chavez was first elected in 1998 to try to undermine and overthrow his presidency.

Now it’s a different situation obviously, because he’s not present physically at this time. But I think that what’s important is that we let the law play itself out here. That we can’t ... they can’t act rashly because those decisions are going to have permanent impact on the country and on how things proceed.

Imagine if they did something like that and declared him absent, a new president was sworn in, new elections were held, and then he recovers. He was legitimately elected, so then what happens? I mean, so these are things that they can’t just act rashly on. And Chavez is in a situation, where he could go either way with his health. So they have to ride it out. In the meantime, there’s continuity of his government. And so that’s what’s important, that things continue to function.

DB: Can we just talk a little bit about where his work is now? Say a little bit about what his impact has been and the work that still lies ahead?

EG: Hugo Chavez has, without a doubt, been one of the most important presidents that Venezuela has ever had throughout its history. He’s brought the country back to what many consider to be a state of true independence, or maybe for the first time, and sovereignty. The natural resources of the country, the strategic resources ... remember Venezuela has the largest oil reserves of any country on our planet, which is a huge issue regarding why there is so much interest in the country, and what that country represents to powerful interests around the world.

And what Chavez has done is utilize those strategic resources to invest in the people of the country, the development of the nation and its potential for progress. So his government over the past 14 years, since he was first elected in ’98. ... He was elected in ’98 and then they had a constitutional process to redraft a new constitution which was then ratified in ’99 so they had to have new elections.

He ran again in ’99 and was elected to begin a new term in 2000. So technically, we could say he has had three terms so far, and this is his fourth. But in
reality this would be his third term, starting this year.

So throughout this time period his government, under his policies directly, has been able to reduce Venezuela’s extreme poverty in more than half, and poverty in general, and also more than 50 percent. Venezuela has a much higher standard of living today. It’s on all these polls that surveys that take place around the world about happiness, they do this thing about which are the world’s happiest countries, Venezuela always ranks in the top five, just within the past, like few years, five or six years.

And that’s due to the fact that the government is heavily invested, 60 percent of national budget in social programs, health care, education, job training, housing subsidies, food subsidies for market places, and in general looking out for the people. Creating new platforms for grass roots organizing and involvement in direct participation in government. You know that overall agenda of the Chavez administration has been to transfer power into the hands of the people, so community organizations are key part of what his principal policies have been and that’s transformed the country.

From a country that was apathetic in the 1990s where people didn’t participate, everyone wanted to leave, nobody felt like there was any hope of anything happening in Venezuela, including myself, because I lived there then and left, but right before Chavez was elected, to become a country where there’s a vibrant democracy, where people are actively involved in their politics and in their local economies.

Where Venezuela is now ranking high, for example, in athletics around the world, sports. I mean something that never happened before, now Venezuelans are winning gold medals and they are participating in all these tournaments because the government has been investing in sports and recreation, things that enrich the lives of other Venezuelans and their culture. Recuperating their culture, their national identity, regaining a sense of dignity and pride, to be Venezuelan and to treasure the Venezuelans. It’s amazing, but that didn’t exist before in the country. And so Chavez has brought that back.

DB: And he did it in the context of the United States government doing everything in their power to try and get rid of him.

EG: Absolutely, from the beginning the U.S. was trying to undermine his government. Then a few years after he was first elected, as he began to implement his policies that he had promised in his campaigns...he actually followed through on his campaign promises, unlike politicians in the U.S.

DB: Can you imagine that?
EG: Right! And so that was a shocker, I mean really, I think a lot of people didn’t think that was going to happen. So as he began to redistribute the oil resources, and make all these social investments, and start creating all these programs, and start taxing oil companies, multinationals, that even were supposed be taxed before under previous governments, they just never paid, and there was all this corruption and commissions.

He began to implement these taxes and, of course, that brought more profit to the country but, of course, it affected powerful interests. There was a U.S.-backed coup against Chavez in 2002 that briefly succeeded, for 48 hours. Then in that extraordinary uprising of the people he was brought back to power. It was completely historical and we will never forget.

And that showed also the importance of Chavez himself, as a president, and of what he was, what he signifies, what the Bolivarian Revolution means to the majority of Venezuelans. Since then the U.S. has heavily funded, spent millions of dollars backing the opposition, and helping build up their political parties, and their coalitions, and their NGOs. And that still goes on today. And then the media, what we’ve seen in terms of, like a media warfare, a constant badgering of misinformation about Venezuela, even today what we’re seeing is in most media they are talking about a crisis in Venezuela, but in Venezuela the people are celebrating, the majority of people are celebrating.

They are out in the streets, celebrating the fact that there is a continuation of the political process that they feel very much a part of. And then we’re seeing a lot of the mass media investing time and energy into all this morbid type of language and discourse about Chavez himself. And talking about his mortality, his death, details that really, have no place in mass media, I have to say.

He is the President of the country, he is a public figure, but there is still a level of privacy that exists, as a human being, and why anyway, do people need to know so many details? I mean, it’s what has become of, I think, our society, is with all this reality television and things like that where you have people feel like they want to know every detail of everyone’s intimate life. And that’s just not the case. The Chavez administration has held true to their respect for his intimacy and his privacy, in that sense.

But, you know, this type of manipulation was also coming out of the U.S., the mass media, the U.S. government spokespeople, and allies, and mass media has been in an effort to try to emphasize some type of division within Chavismo, within Chavez’s supporters. A division that’s not true, that’s not been apparent. But they’ve been going at it, over and over again, now for months really, saying that Nicolas Maduro, the vice president, is at odds with the head
of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello. Both want power, both want to be president, once Chavez is out of the picture, the whole thing is just going to fall apart. Pit one against the other, in order to just divide and destroy it all.

DB: Let me jump in here now, Eva Golinger, and talk a little bit about that not in terms of prying about his health. But in the event that he cannot return to power, will the revolution that he started, will it continue? Will either of these men, who he’s appointed or one of them who he has said is directly would be his predecessor, the Vice President? Will this person be strong enough to carry on the work that he did, in the face of all the resistance that he got and all the attacks that came from abroad?

EG: Well, I’m not a fortune teller to say whether or not, it will, or will not. What I can say is, from the years of experience of being entrenched in the Bolivarian Revolution, and at the side of President Chavez, and participating in it. And being an active observer and participant is that, Venezuela has changed forever. There’s no way that it’s going back to how it was before. It may be different but I think that that would just be a natural process of evolution within the revolution. Things always have to be transforming and changing.

DB: So that the structural changes that have been made can be continued, that there is a structure in place for the work that he’s done, to continue.

EG: Absolutely. There was still a ton of work left to be done, if not an endless amount, because there’s always new things coming up, so for example, the concept of power in the hands of the people is a very idealistic concept, and it’s not something, or even Utopian, it’s not something that’s been fully achieved yet. It’s begun, to put it one way.

They have been focusing on the creation of, as they are calling them, the Comunas, communes, a regional type of local grassroots governments where you can connect with others in terms of local governance. The communes are run by actually the communities that live there, and that there’s no middlemen, no bureaucrats, no elected officials necessarily representing them but rather people are making the decisions.

So, things like that have begun but they haven’t fully developed. And, will they? I don’t know. They are in a process of doing that, at least things have transformed so they’re different than they were before. And, I would say, in a positive way.

Nicolas Maduro, the named political successor of Chavez is someone who has an immense capacity. He’s not going to be Chavez, no one’s ever going to be
Chavez. I don’t think anyone should even expect that. That would be ridiculous. Chavez has also been an incredible leader, [he] unified all these different sectors, he’s a magnetic personality and an enormous amount of charisma. Nicolas doesn’t have that, but he has other characteristics.

He was a grassroots organizer, he’s very humble. He came from the working class, he drove a bus, he’s someone who identifies directly with the majority of the people in the country, and he speaks the same language, but Chavez did too. But Chavez had sort of an all encompassing persona, whereas Nicolas doesn’t. He’s more like a regular guy, and so that could work to his advantage.

He’s someone who’s learned at the side of Chavez now for 20 years. He was with him from the beginning of his movement. So, he has a great political and diplomatic capacity. He’s been the Foreign Minister since 2006, he’s someone who can mediate and deal with all kinds of people, all around the world. He’s been in all kinds of situations. He doesn’t turn his back on anyone. He has a very pleasant personality.

So do I think that he could continue on, and be a good president of Venezuela? I do. I do think that. And that I do think that he would receive the backing of most of Chavez’s supporters, because Chavez explicitly said “This is my guy.” And I think people trust that. And so, that will continue.

Does that mean that he would be could be a re-elected president after a first term? I’m not sure. It would depend on how things continue. But, I do think that there’s an issue of Chavez, the leader. Everyone was always asking before Chavez got sick, ”What would happen if Chavez is out of the picture? Will this continue?”

And I think now, that we’re living that moment, at least temporarily, maybe permanently, that what’s being shown is that there is a collective leadership that has grown, and that has developed under Chavez’s leadership and that that’s what’s now coming to fruition. In the end, that was the overall goal. Not that one person would always be above it all, and directing, but that what was being directed would eventually take over everything. And people would be directing themselves.

I think it will continue, it may be a little different than before, obviously we won’t have the emblematic figure of Chavez and his very entertaining discourse, and always unpredictable actions that have really impacted Latin American politics now for more than a decade.

But I think Venezuela will continue to be a major player, and it’s inevitable, because it’s a country with the largest oil reserves in the world. There’s
always going to be some interest. Before, it was a puppet of the United States. I don’t think it will ever be that again.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net). You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

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**More Second Amendment Madness**

**Exclusive:** Elements of the American Right are suggesting that Barack Obama, the twice-elected President of the United States, is a tyrant whose gun-control plans should be resisted by force, a gross and dangerous distortion of why the Framers wrote the Second Amendment, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Right’s powerful propaganda apparatus has sold millions of Americans on the dangerous and false notion that the Framers of the U.S. Constitution incorporated the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights so an armed population could fight the government that the Framers had just created.

As a result of that historical lie, many right-wingers today appear to be heeding a call to arms by buying up assault weapons at a frenetic pace. A “Gun Appreciation Day” is scheduled for the Saturday before Barack Obama’s Second Inaugural, which coincidentally falls on Martin Luther King Day. Thousands of gun owners are expected to turn out waving flags and brandishing rifles.

The organizer of that effort, right-wing activist Larry Ward, wrote that “the Obama administration has shown that it is more than willing to trample the Constitution to impose its dictates upon the American people.”

In recent weeks, this bogus narrative of the Framers seeking to encourage violence to subvert the peaceful and orderly process that they had painstakingly created in Philadelphia in 1787 also has been pushed by prominent right-wingers, such as radio host Rush Limbaugh and Fox News personality Andrew Napolitano.

Napolitano declared: “The historical reality of the Second Amendment’s protection of the right to keep and bear arms is not that it protects the right to shoot deer. It protects the right to shoot tyrants, and it protects the right to shoot at them effectively, with the same instruments they would use upon us.”
The suggestion is that armed Americans must confront the “tyrannical” Barack Obama the twice-elected President of the United States (and the first African-American to hold that office) if he presses ahead seeking commonsense gun restrictions in the face of the massacre of 20 schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut, and hundreds of other horrendous incidents of gun violence.

These “revolutionary” Americans have been persuaded that they are channeling the intent of the Framers who supposedly saw armed uprisings against the legally constituted U.S. government as an important element of “liberty.”

But that belief is not the historical reality. Indeed, the reality is almost the opposite. The Second Amendment was enacted so each state would have the specific right to form “a well-regulated militia” to maintain “security,” i.e. to put down armed rebellions.

The Framers also made clear what they thought should happen to people who took up arms against the Republic. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but “domestic Violence,” and treason is defined in the Constitution as “levying war against” the United States as well as giving “Aid and Comfort” to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

Second Amendment’s History

The historical context of the Second Amendment also belies today’s right-wing mythology. At the time of the Constitutional Convention, the young nation was experiencing violent unrest, such as the Shays’ Rebellion in western Massachusetts. That armed uprising was testing the ability of the newly independent nation to establish order within the framework of a democratic Republic, a fairly untested idea at the time. European monarchies were predicting chaos and collapse for the United States.

Among the most concerned about that possibility was General George Washington, who had sacrificed greatly for the birth of the new nation. After the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781 and their acceptance of American independence in 1783, Washington fretted over the inability of the states-rights-oriented Articles of Confederation, then governing the country, to deal with its economic and security challenges.

Washington grew disgusted with the Articles’ recognition of 13 “independent” and “sovereign” states and the correspondingly weak central government, called not even a government, but a “league of friendship.”

As Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, Washington had watched his soldiers suffer when various states reneged on their commitment to supply money
and arms. After the war, Washington retired but stayed active in seeking reforms that would strengthen the central government’s ability to organize national commerce and to maintain order.

His fears deepened in 1786 when Daniel Shays, a former Continental Army captain, led an uprising of other veterans and farmers in western Massachusetts, taking up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

Washington received reports on the crisis from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as his longtime logistical chief, Gen. Henry Knox, and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, who accepted the British surrender at Yorktown as Washington’s second in command. They kept Washington apprised of the disorder, which he feared might encourage renewed interference in American affairs by the British or other European powers.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information about the rebellion from a friend in Connecticut, Washington wrote: “I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe.”

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the unrest: “What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?” Washington was especially concerned about the possibility of a hidden British hand.

Lincoln responded: “Many of them [the rebels] appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity.”

However, the U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation lacked the means to restore order. So wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

“If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite a fit subject for a mad house,” Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government “shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws anarchy & confusion must prevail.”

Just weeks later, Washington’s alarm about Shays’ Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in and preside over the Constitutional Convention,
which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to “We the People” and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

The key point of the Constitution was to create a peaceful means for the United States to implement policies favored by the people but within a structure of checks and balances to prevent radical changes deemed too disruptive to the established order. For instance, the two-year terms of the House of Representatives were meant to reflect the popular will but the six-year terms of the Senate were designed to temper the passions of the moment (and senators were initially chosen by state legislatures, not the people).

Within this framework of a democratic Republic where peaceful change was possible though intentionally gradual the Framers criminalized taking up arms against the government. But it was the Constitution’s drastic expansion of federal power that prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia’s Patrick Henry who spearheaded the Anti-Federalist movement.

Prospects for the Constitution’s ratification were in such doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were. To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. The Bill of Rights was a mix of concessions, some substantive and some rhetorical, to both individual citizens and the states.

The Second Amendment was primarily a right granted to the states. It read: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.”

Madison’s political maneuvering narrowly secured approval of the Constitution in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights, which was ratified in 1791. [For more details on the Constitution, see Robert Parry’s America’s Stolen Narrative.]

**Behind the Second Amendment**

As the preface to the Second Amendment makes clear, the concern was about enabling states to organize militias that could maintain “security,” which fit with the Constitution’s goal of “domestic Tranquility” within the framework of a Republic.
This concept was amplified by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of “a well-regulated militia” by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

At the time, Madison was in the U.S. Congress and Washington was in the presidency with both supporting the new laws so the “original intent” of the Framers could not be easily misunderstood.

The right “to keep and bear arms” was always within the context of participating in militias or today the National Guard not as the right of individuals to possess devastating weapons that could be used to violently overthrow the U.S. government or to kill its officials. (The recognition of a collective rather than individual right was only reversed in 2008 when right-wing ideologues had gained control of the U.S. Supreme Court and then overturned longstanding legal precedents.)

But if there was any doubt about how the actual Framers saw the Second Amendment, it was answered in 1794 when President Washington led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels in Pennsylvania. The revolt soon collapsed; many leaders fled; and two participants were convicted of high treason and sentenced to hanging, though Washington later pardoned them.

Beyond this clear historical record that the Framers’ intent with the Second Amendment was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions there is also the simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation’s aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land and favored domestic tranquility to promote economic development and growth.

So, it would be counterintuitive as well as anti-historical to believe that Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people at least the white males to repulse uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays’ Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts.

**Fabricated History**

However, the Right has invested heavily over the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government.
To build that narrative, a few incendiary quotes are cherry-picked, taken out of context or invented. [See, for instance, Steven Krulik’s compilation of such apocryphal references.]

This “history” has then been amplified through the Right’s powerful propaganda apparatus Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today’s gun owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

It should be noted, too, that Thomas Jefferson, one of the most radical-sounding (though hypocritical) leaders of the Revolutionary War, was not a Framer of the Constitution. In 1787, when the document was written, he was the U.S. representative in France.

There is also the obvious point that the Framers’ idea of a weapon was a single-shot musket that required time-consuming reloading, not a powerful semi-automatic assault rifle that could fire up to 100 bullets in a matter of seconds without the necessity to reload.

However, people like Andrew Napolitano on the Right as well as some dreamy revolutionaries on the Left still suggest that the Framers enacted the Second Amendment so the firepower of people trying to overthrow the U.S. government and kill its agents would be equal to whatever weapons the government possessed.

This crazy notion would be laughable if its consequences were not so horrible. The human price for this phony concept of “liberty” and this bogus history is the horrendous death toll that gun violence inflicts on American society, including the recent slaughter of those children in Newtown.

Yet, instead of recognizing the actual history and accepting that the Constitution was an attempt by the Framers to create a democratic process for peaceful change, today’s advocates of a violent revolution whether from the Right or the Left feed the paranoia and the ignorance of their followers.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com).
As America prepares for the Second Inaugural of its first African-American president and as demands grow for some commonsense gun control after a horrific school massacre the Right is arming itself amid hysterical rhetoric about the need to “shoot tyrants,” ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar notes.

By Paul R. Pillar

A public discussion at the Council on Foreign Relations last week was concerned with identifying particular trouble spots and troublesome issues around the world that are apt to demand policy attention during 2013. One of the speakers, David Gordon of the Eurasia Group, mentioned in passing that an issue he was not worried about this year was radicalism in developed countries. He did not specify what variety of radicalism; probably most in the room simply assumed he was referring to the Islamist variety.

That variety, after all, as it manifests itself both at home and abroad, has now been for some time almost the sole preoccupation in the United States as far as violent radicalism is concerned. When Peter King, as chairman in the previous Congress of the House Committee on Homeland Security, conducted a series of hearings on terrorist threats in the United States, the subject was all Islamist, all the time.

One hazard of such a narrow focus on one type of radicalism is to reduce the likelihood we will notice the rise of other types. Different types of radicalism, and the subsets of it that involve terrorist violence, come and go in waves, as they have over the past several decades.

The rise of any one wave is generally related to the broader political environment in two somewhat antipodal ways. The radicalism usually is embedded in a larger mood, movement or ethos. But it also usually is a reaction against some political trend or development.

While keeping these patterns in mind, it would be useful to look again at a report that was prepared four years ago in the Department of Homeland Security. The report was titled Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment. Its release led to an uproar among those on the Right who were uncomfortable with any government report acknowledging that there is American extremism on the Right.

Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, evidently anxious to reduce her vulnerability to charges of politically-inspired analysis, responded by
withdrawing the report, saying it had not been properly vetted within the department. DHS’s analytical work on right-wing extremism has reportedly been reduced to a single employee.

The report, which nonetheless made it into the hands of news agencies, may be one of the more worthwhile reads among government documents having such a short official shelf life. The report stated that although there were at the time no known plans among right-wing extremists to commit specific acts of terrorism, such extremists “may be gaining new recruits by playing on their fears about several emergent issues.”

One of those bits of grist for the fear-mongering was “the election of the first African-American president.” Another was the prospect of gun control:

Proposed imposition of firearms restrictions and weapons bans likely would attract new members into the ranks of right-wing extremist groups, as well as potentially spur some of them to begin planning and training for violence against the government. The high volume of purchases and stockpiling of weapons and ammunition by right-wing extremists in anticipation of restrictions and bans in some parts of the country continue to be a primary concern to law enforcement.

The report-writers likened what they were seeing to what was happening with this extremist fringe in the 1990s. Although we have not witnessed in the subsequent four years anything like a repetition of the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, other indications suggest the report was on to something.

Charles Blow in the New York Times alludes to some of this when he notes, using data compiled by the Southern Poverty Law Center, that the anti-government “Patriot” movement has burgeoned since 2008, having grown to more than 1,200 groups nationwide by 2011. More than a fourth of these are militias that perform paramilitary training.

Now in 2013, we are about to have the second inauguration of that same African-American president, the one with the foreign-sounding name. Gun control is also again prominently on the national agenda, owing mainly to more mass shootings in schools.

And some of the rhetoric that melds resistance to gun control with a broader anti-government agenda is nothing short of frightening. Here’s what Fox News commentator and, believe it or not, former judge Andrew Napolitano (no relation to Janet) wrote last week:

“The historical reality of the Second Amendment’s protection of the right to keep and bear arms is not that it protects the right to shoot deer. It protects
the right to shoot tyrants, and it protects the right to shoot at them effectively, with the same instruments they would use upon us.”

If shooting, or bombing, growing out of this type of attitude starts, we should already have a fairly good idea of what the perpetrators are opposed to. We ought to reflect as well on the other part of how a wave of extremism fits into the larger political environment, i.e., how it is the extreme tail of some more broadly shared way of thinking.

The roots of current anti-government sentiments are diverse, of course. And as for the gun control part of this, we know that the lobby opposing controls is as rich and potent as ever. We also should acknowledge the growth of a form of political intolerance in which some people believe that having their particular preferences prevail is so important that it is worth inflicting, or threatening, harm to the country.

It looks as though we are about to see a non-kinetic form of this again in Congress in a few weeks. We should not be surprised if extremists use the kinetic form.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)

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**Finding Excuses to Torture**

Despite evidence over the centuries that torture fails to elicit reliable information and is criminal as well apologists for George W. Bush and movies like Zero Dark Thirty continue to perpetuate the myth that torture is a necessary evil, at least when Americans are doing the torturing, as Lawrence Davidson writes.

By Lawrence Davidson

In 2005, I wrote an essay, published in the journal Logos, entitled “Torture in our Time.” In it I laid out the historical evidence for the conclusion that torture rarely works. This position goes back at least to the Enlightenment when Cesare Beccaria wrote a famous pamphlet, “On Crimes and Punishments” (1764) in which he observed the obvious:
“The impression of pain, then, may increase to such a degree that, occupying the mind entirely, it will compel the sufferer to use the shortest method of freeing himself from torment. ... He will accuse himself of crimes of which he is innocent so that the very means employed to distinguish the innocent from the guilty will most effectually destroy all difference between them.”

Along with false admissions of guilt, those under torture will tell their tormenter just about anything, regardless of truth and accuracy. Modern researchers, and even modern practitioners of interrogation, know this to be so. They have come to the same conclusion as Beccaria. Torture produces more false and fictional information than not.

For instance, Darius Rejali in his book *Torture and Democracy* (2009), tells us that “the available evidence [against the efficacy of torture] is conclusive” and alludes to the fact that, for 250 years, criminologists, and psychologists have been pointing this out.

The ex-intelligence officer, Colonel John Rothrock, who headed a combat interrogation team in Vietnam, told the Washington Post in 2005 that, given the Vietnam experience, “he doesn’t know any professional intelligence officers of my generation who would think this [torture] is a good idea” even in a so-called “ticking bomb” scenario.

The inclusion of “my generation” in Rothrock’s statement implies that each generation has to learn the truth about torture anew, over the wreckage of newly broken bodies.

More recently, in December 2012, the Senate Intelligence committee approved a report which, in some 6,000 pages, concludes that “the harsh interrogation measures used by the CIA [that is the torture techniques allowed by the administration of George W. Bush] did not produce significant intelligence breakthroughs.”

This specifically includes the production of intelligence leading to the discovery of Osama bin Laden. Indeed, the report says that torture actually became “counterproductive in the broader campaign against al-Qaeda.” All this led Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to call Bush Jr.’s secret CIA prisons and use of torture “terrible mistakes.”

**The Eternal Skeptics**

For a certain subset of the population (and not just in the U.S.) these truths do not matter. This subset constitutes a modern warrior caste and their followers. The American sampling includes many (but not all) neoconservatives,
classic tough-guys turned politicians, faux-realists, military professionals, and an ever-present small number of people who just like to hurt and humiliate others and find their way into professions that allow them to do so (often the actual torturers).

For all these folks the evidence against torture appears counter-intuitive and just does not “feel right.” Therefore, intuitively, these skeptics feel more comfortable with another statement, that might be juxtaposed with Beccaria’s above. This one was written by White House Counsel Alberto R. Gonzales, in a memorandum for President Bush on Jan. 25, 2002:

“The nature of the new war places a high premium on ... the ability to quickly obtain information from captured terrorists in order to avoid further atrocities against American civilians. In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva’s [the Geneva Convention Against Torture] strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners.”

Currently, it is the Republican Party that harbors many of the skeptics who share this opinion about the efficacy of torture and the “obsolete” nature of the treaties (ratified by the United States) forbidding it.

Some Republicans on the Senate Intelligence Committee that issued the latest report proving torture’s uselessness, even refused to participate in the report’s investigatory process. For them this might have been the result of obeying their party’s dictate to remain loyal to the discredited Bush administration.

For others though, it was loyalty plus their belief (in the face of all the evidence to the contrary) that Bush was correct to send the CIA out into the world to cause unbearable pain and suffering. They believe such behavior materially contributed to “making America safe.”

Making Torture’s Case at the Movies

Unfortunately, there is a general tendency on the part of Americans to agree with the skeptics. And, this trend is about to be strengthened. There is now a movie, Zero Dark Thirty (the work of the Oscar-winning director Kathryn Bigelow) in U.S. theaters that will reinforce the erroneous view that torture works.

Zero Dark Thirty purports to tell the story, based on “first-hand accounts,” of the hunt for and killing of Osama Bin Laden. According to this film, torture formed a “critical aspect of intelligence gathering” process. There is good evidence that the U.S. government assisted in making the movie, if not the actual writing of the script.
It would be nice if some talented director could make a movie, based on “first-hand accounts” of the making of the Senate report on Bush era torture. But that sort of movie will not be made because Washington has no desire to tie its hands in this regard. Nor will the truly accurate documentaries (see below) that do exist on the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, or the now defunct hell-hole that was Abu Ghraib, get national distribution.

However, we can expect many more films like *Zero Dark Thirty*. This is because the recent 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) signed by President Barack Obama makes legal direct government funding of propaganda aimed at the American population. Perhaps the U.S. government is about to buy its own back-lot in Hollywood.

There is a story about Abraham Lincoln that claims that every time he was confronted by someone extolling the benefits of slavery, he had a desire to see it (slavery) tried out on the one defending it. Torture can be approached the same way.

Does President Bush Jr. and ex-counsel Alberto Gonzales think it is a vital part of America’s defense? Do those Republicans on the Senate Intelligence Committee have such faith in torture that they can dismiss out of hand 6,000 pages of contrary evidence?

OK. Let’s see torture tried out on these fellows and note whether they will confess to false reports about, say, their sex lives.

Just wishful thinking. The torturers we are talking about are all past or present powerful government officials and their henchmen. Most of them will die in bed and maybe, someday, have their face put on a postage stamp. Their horrid deeds, already excused, will soon be forgotten.

For what are crimes when committed by the average person, are but vices when committed by the powerful (so said Benjamin Disraeli). Finally, it has been known for ages that, as the old Latin saying goes, “in times of war the laws go silent.”

Note: Here are three good documentaries touching on the U.S. practice of torture: Alex Gibney, “Taxi to the Dark Side;” Rory Kennedy, “Ghosts of Abu Ghraib;” Annie Sunberg and Ricki Stern, “The End of America.”

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest; America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood;* and *Islamic Fundamentalism.*
Slanting the Case on Iran’s Nukes

From the Archive: The New York Times reports UN nuclear monitoring chief Yukiya Amano is dampening hopes for new nuclear talks with Iran by demanding access to its Parchin military base. But the press still ignores evidence Amano is no honest broker, but part of the U.S./Israel camp, as Robert Parry reported in 2011.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on Nov. 21, 2011. Slightly edited for updating.)

As Washington’s political/media class rises up in arms over WMD allegations against Iran, it might be worth recalling how a similar process played out a decade ago when the U.S. public was drawn into a war with Iraq. It wasn’t just that George W. Bush told some lies; it was more complicated than that.

In 2002-2003, Official Washington professed a deep faith in the professionalism of the CIA’s analytical division, which accepted enough of the bogus intelligence being pushed by neocon war hawks to create a basis for Bush’s invasion of Iraq. Only later did it become clear how politicized the CIA’s analysis had become.

Today, a similar role is being played by the United Nations’ International Atomic Energy Agency, which during the run-up to war with Iraq and under different management was one of the few international bodies with the courage to reject some of Bush’s claims about Iraq.

However, in the past few years, the IAEA has become deeply politicized under its new director general, Japanese diplomat Yukiya Amano. Yet, you wouldn’t know that from how the U.S. news media is accepting what the IAEA says about Iran, much as the U.S. press corps avoided questioning the CIA’s assessments on Iraq.

The evidence of the IAEA’s politicization can be found in confidential U.S. diplomatic cables obtained by Wikileaks and published in 2010 by the Guardian newspaper in the U.K. In those cables, the IAEA’s new leadership indicated it was willing to give Washington what it wanted on Iran, just as the CIA’s hierarchy bent to Bush’s needs on Iraq last decade.

According to the U.S. embassy cables from Vienna, Austria, the IAEA’s headquarters, Americans diplomats in 2009 were cheering the prospect that Amano would advance American interests in ways that outgoing IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei wouldn’t.
In a July 9, 2009, cable, American chargé Geoffrey Pyatt said Amano was thankful for U.S. support of his election. “Amano attributed his election to support from the U.S., Australia and France, and cited U.S. intervention with Argentina as particularly decisive,” the cable said.

The appreciative Amano informed Pyatt that as IAEA director general, he would take a different “approach on Iran from that of ElBaradei” and he “saw his primary role as implementing safeguards and UNSC [United Nations Security Council]/Board resolutions,” i.e. U.S.-driven sanctions and demands against Iran.

Amano also discussed how to restructure the senior ranks of the IAEA, including elimination of one top official and the retention of another. “We wholly agree with Amano’s assessment of these two advisors and see these decisions as positive first signs,” Pyatt commented.

In return, Pyatt made clear that Amano could expect strong U.S. financial support, stating that “the United States would do everything possible to support his successful tenure as Director General and, to that end, anticipated that continued U.S. voluntary contributions to the IAEA would be forthcoming. Amano offered that a ‘reasonable increase’ in the regular budget would be helpful.”

Pyatt learned, too, that Amano had consulted with Israeli Ambassador Israel Michaeli “immediately after his appointment” and that Michaeli “was fully confident of the priority Amano accords verification issues.” Michaeli added that he discounted some of Amano’s public remarks about there being “no evidence of Iran pursuing a nuclear weapons capability” as just words that Amano felt he had to say “to persuade those who did not support him about his ‘impartiality.’”

In private, Amano agreed to “consultations” with the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, Pyatt reported. (It is ironic indeed that Amano would have secret contacts with Israeli officials about Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program, which has yet to yield a single bomb, when Israel ranks as the world’s leading rogue nuclear state with a large and undeclared nuclear arsenal.)

‘Constructive Ambiguity’

In a subsequent cable dated Oct. 16, 2009, the U.S. mission in Vienna said Amano “took pains to emphasize his support for U.S. strategic objectives for the Agency. Amano reminded ambassador [Glyn Davies] on several occasions that he was solidly in the U.S. court on every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program.

“More candidly, Amano noted the importance of maintaining a certain
'constructive ambiguity’ about his plans, at least until he took over for DG ElBaradei in December” 2009.

In other words, the emerging picture of Amano is of a bureaucrat eager to bend in directions favored by the United States and Israel, especially regarding Iran’s nuclear program. Amano’s behavior surely contrasts with how the more independent-minded ElBaradei resisted some of Bush’s key claims about Iraq’s supposed nuclear weapons program, denouncing some documents as forgeries.

The U.K. Guardian observed Amano’s cozy relationship with the United States, but major U.S. news outlets have avoided any critical examination of Amano. Instead, they simply have trumpeted without skepticism IAEA reports critical of Iran. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Déjà vu Over Iran Nuke Charges” and “Big Media’s Double Standards on Iran.”]

For instance, the neocon-dominated Washington Post has continued to pump out anti-Iranian propaganda. On Nov. 18, 2011, the Post fronted an article entitled “Iran’s role probed in Gaddafi stockpile” suggesting with no solid evidence at all that Iran had supplied Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya with artillery shells for chemical weapons.

Co-produced with the Center for Public Integrity, the Post article said U.S. intelligence is investigating how the shells got to Libya and that “several sources said early suspicion had fallen on Iran. A U.S. official with access to classified information confirmed that there were ‘serious concerns’ that Iran had provided the shells, albeit some years ago.

“In recent weeks, U.N. inspectors [at IAEA] have released new information indicating that Iran has the capability to develop a nuclear bomb, a charge Iranian officials have long rejected. Confirmed evidence of Iran’s provision of the specialized shells may exacerbate international tensions over the country’s alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.”

Troubling Parallel

If any of this is creating a sense of déjà vu, with supposedly objective organizations fanning the flames of confrontation based on little hard proof, it’s understandable. A nearly identical process paved the way to war with Iraq. (Over the years, for instance, the Center for Public Integrity has received substantial funding from liberal foundations and thus had credibility with many progressives but later tilted to the right.)

In 2002-2003, the U.S. political/media process was similarly overwhelmed with supposedly objective evidence of Iraq’s pursuit of nuclear bombs and other unconventional weapons, including disclosure from “scientists” defecting from
Iraq who were then funneled to U.S. intelligence analysts and journalists by the dissident Iraqi National Congress [INC].

It was not until 2006 when the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a long-awaited post-mortem on why the U.S. intelligence community performed so badly regarding Iraq that details were revealed about how the INC shaped the pro-war debate by coaching Iraqi “defectors” how to lie. Amid the powerful “group think” that gripped Official Washington, the lies fed the war fever.

Just like today, it was far easier and safer for politicians and pundits to get all macho against a “designated enemy” in the Middle East than it was to examine the specifics of the WMD claims and risk being called an enemy “apologist.”

After all, what if it turned out that Iraq’s Saddam Hussein had hid stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons? Anyone who had challenged the WMD “group think” would have been identified as a “Saddam stooge” and might never work again.

By contrast, there was almost no career danger if you ran with the pack, even if it turned out that there were no secret WMD caches. Then, you could simply say that “everyone” was deceived and that no one should be singled out for punishment.

As it turned out with very few exceptions those who pushed disinformation that justified the Iraq War have maintained their esteemed spots in the Washington establishment.

Of course, some people did end up paying a price for the bogus Iraq-WMD “group think” the nearly 4,500 dead U.S. soldiers, the tens of thousands of wounded, and the hundreds of thousands of dead and maimed Iraqis, plus the U.S. taxpayers who got stuck with the bill. But few of those folks attend Georgetown cocktail parties.

Given the self-interest of Washington’s WMD-duped insiders, it shouldn’t come as much of a surprise that the report detailing how the phony WMD case was built got little notice in 2006 when the Senate Intelligence Committee released its finding on how the Iraqi National Congress worked with American neocons to sell the case for war with Iraq.

The History

The official U.S. relationship with these Iraqi exiles dated back to 1991 after President George H.W. Bush had routed Hussein’s army from Kuwait and wanted to help Saddam Hussein’s domestic opponents.
In May 1991, the CIA approached Ahmed Chalabi, a secular Shiite who had not lived in Iraq since 1956. Chalabi was far from a perfect opposition candidate, however. Beyond his long isolation from his homeland, Chalabi was a fugitive from bank fraud charges in Jordan. Still, in June 1992, the Iraqi exiles held an organizational meeting in Vienna out of which came the Iraqi National Congress with Chalabi as the group’s chairman.

But Chalabi soon began rubbing some CIA officers the wrong way. They complained about the quality of his information, the excessive size of his security detail, his lobbying of Congress, and his resistance to working as a team player.

For his part, smooth-talking Chalabi bristled at the idea that he was a U.S. intelligence asset, preferring to see himself as an independent political leader. Nevertheless, he and his organization were not averse to accepting American money.

With U.S. financial backing, the INC waged a propaganda campaign against Hussein and arranged for “a steady stream of low-ranking walk-ins” to provide intelligence about the Iraqi military, the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

The INC’s mix of duties propaganda and intelligence would create concerns within the CIA as would the issue of Chalabi’s “coziness” with the Shiite government of Iran. The CIA concluded that Chalabi was double-dealing both sides when he falsely informed Iran that the United States wanted Iran’s help in conducting anti-Hussein operations.

“Chalabi passed a fabricated message from the White House to” an Iranian intelligence officer in northern Iraq, the CIA reported. According to one CIA representative, Chalabi used National Security Council stationery for the fabricated letter, a charge that Chalabi denied.

In December 1996, Clinton administration officials decided to terminate the CIA’s relationship with the INC and Chalabi. “There was a breakdown in trust,” CIA Director George Tenet later told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

However, in 1998, with the congressional passage of the Iraq Liberation Act, the INC was again one of the exile organizations that qualified for U.S. funding. Starting in March 2000, the State Department agreed to grant an INC foundation almost $33 million for several programs, including more propaganda operations and collection of information about alleged war crimes committed by Hussein’s regime.

By March 2001, with George W. Bush in office and already focusing on Iraq, the INC was given greater leeway to pursue its projects, including an Information
Collection Program. The INC’s blurred responsibilities on intelligence gathering and propaganda dissemination raised fresh concerns within the State Department. But Bush’s National Security Council intervened against State’s attempts to cut off funding.

The NSC shifted the INC operation to the control of the Defense Department, where neoconservatives wielded more influence. To little avail, CIA officials warned their counterparts at the Defense Intelligence Agency about suspicions that “the INC was penetrated by Iranian and possibly other intelligence services, and that the INC had its own agenda,” the Senate report said.

“You’ve got a real bucket full of worms with the INC and we hope you’re taking the appropriate steps,” the CIA told the DIA.

Media Hype

But the CIA’s warnings did little to stanch the flow of INC propaganda into America’s politics and media. Besides irrigating the U.S. intelligence community with fresh propaganda, the INC funneled a steady stream of “defectors” to U.S. news outlets eager for anti-Hussein scoops.

The “defectors” also made the rounds of Congress where members saw a political advantage in citing the INC’s propaganda as a way to talk tough about the Middle East. In turn, conservative and neoconservative think tanks honed their reputations in Washington by staying at the cutting edge of the negative news about Hussein, with human rights groups ready to pile on, too, against the Iraqi dictator.

The Bush administration found all this anti-Hussein propaganda fitting perfectly with its international agenda. So the INC’s information program served the institutional needs and biases of Official Washington. Saddam Hussein was a despised figure anyway, with no influential constituency that would challenge even the most outrageous accusations against him.

A war fever was sweeping the United States and the INC was doing all it could to spread the infection. INC’s “defectors” supplied primary or secondary intelligence on two key points in particular, Iraq’s supposed rebuilding of its unconventional weapons and its alleged training of non-Iraqi terrorists.

Sometimes, these “defectors” would enter the cloistered world of U.S. intelligence with entrées from former U.S. government officials.

For instance, ex-CIA Director James Woolsey referred at least a couple of these Iraqi sources to the DIA. Woolsey, who was affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and other neoconservative think tanks, had
been one of the Reagan administration’s favorite Democrats in the 1980s because he supported a hawkish foreign policy. After Bill Clinton won the White House, Woolsey parlayed his close ties to the neocons into the job as CIA director.

In early 1993, Clinton’s foreign policy adviser Samuel “Sandy” Berger explained to one well-placed Democratic official that Woolsey was given the CIA job because the Clinton team felt it owed a favor to the neoconservative *New Republic*, which had lent Clinton some cachet with the insider crowd of Washington.

Amid that more relaxed post-Cold War mood, the Clinton team viewed the CIA directorship as a kind of a patronage plum that could be handed out as a favor to campaign supporters. But new international challenges soon emerged and Woolsey proved to be an ineffective leader of the intelligence community. After two years, he was replaced.

As the 1990s wore on, the spurned Woolsey grew closer to Washington’s fast-growing neoconservative movement, which was openly hostile to President Clinton for his perceived softness in asserting U.S. military power, especially against Arab regimes in the Middle East.

On Jan. 26, 1998, the neocon Project for the New American Century sent a letter to Clinton urging the ouster of Saddam Hussein by force if necessary. Woolsey was one of the 18 signers. By early 2001, he also had grown close to the INC, having been hired as co-counsel to represent eight Iraqis, including INC members, who had been detained on immigration charges.

So, Woolsey was well-positioned to serve as a conduit for INC “defectors” trying to get their stories to U.S. officials and to the American public.

**The ‘Sources’**

DIA officials told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Woolsey introduced them to the first in a long line of INC-sponsored Iraqi “defectors” who told the DIA about Hussein’s WMD and his supposed relationship with Islamic terrorists. For his part, Woolsey said he didn’t recall making that referral.

The debriefings of “Source One” as he was called in the Senate Intelligence Committee report generated more than 250 intelligence reports. Two of the reports described alleged terrorist training sites in Iraq, where Afghan, Pakistani and Palestinian nationals were allegedly taught military skills at the Salman Pak base, 20 miles south of Baghdad.

“Many Iraqis believe that Saddam Hussein had made an agreement with Usama bin Ladin in order to support his terrorist movement against the U.S.,” Source One
claimed, according to the Senate report.

After the 9/11 attacks, information from Source One and other INC-connected "defectors" began surfacing in U.S. press accounts, not only in the right-wing news media, but many mainstream publications.

In an Oct. 12, 2001, column entitled "What About Iraq?" Washington Post chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland cited "accumulating evidence of Iraq’s role in sponsoring the development on its soil of weapons and techniques for international terrorism," including training at Salman Pak.

Hoagland’s sources included Iraqi army defector Sabah Khalifa Khodada and another unnamed Iraqi ex-intelligence officer in Turkey. Hoagland also criticized the CIA for not taking seriously a possible Iraqi link to 9/11.

Hoagland’s column was followed by a Page One article in The New York Times, which was headlined "Defectors Cite Iraqi Training for Terrorism." It relied on Khodada, the second source in Turkey (who was later identified as Abu Zeinab al-Quraïry, a former senior officer in Iraq’s intelligence agency, the Mukhabarat), and a lower-ranking member of Mukhabarat.

This story described 40 to 50 Islamic militants getting training at Salman Pak at any one time, including lessons on how to hijack an airplane without weapons. There were also claims about a German scientist working on biological weapons.

In a Columbia Journalism Review retrospective on press coverage of U.S. intelligence on Iraq, writer Douglas McCollam asked Times correspondent Chris Hedges about the Times article, which had been written in coordination with a PBS Frontline documentary called “Gunning for Saddam,” with correspondent Lowell Bergman.

Explaining the difficulty of checking out defector accounts when they meshed with the interests of the U.S. government, Hedges said, “We tried to vet the defectors and we didn’t get anything out of Washington that said, ‘these guys are full of shit.’”

For his part, Bergman told CJR’s McCollam, “The people involved appeared credible and we had no way of getting into Iraq ourselves.”

The journalistic competition to break anti-Hussein scoops was building. Based in Paris, Hedges said he would get periodic calls from Times editors asking that he check out defector stories originating from Chalabi’s operation.

“I thought he was unreliable and corrupt, but just because someone is a sleazebag doesn’t mean he might not know something or that everything he says is
Hedges said. Hedges described Chalabi as having an “endless stable” of ready sources who could fill in American reporters on any number of Iraq-related topics.

The Salman Pak story would be one of many products from the INC’s propaganda mill that would prove influential in the run-up to the Iraq War but would be knocked down later by U.S. intelligence agencies.

According to the Senate Intelligence Committee’s post-mortem, the DIA stated in June 2006 that it found “no credible reports that non-Iraqis were trained to conduct or support transnational terrorist operations at Salman Pak after 1991.”

Explaining the origins for the bogus tales, the DIA concluded that Operation Desert Storm had brought attention to the training base at Salman Pak, so “fabricators and unestablished sources who reported hearsay or third-hand information created a large volume of human intelligence reporting. This type of reporting surged after September 2001.”

Going with the Flow

However, in the prelude to the Iraq War, U.S. intelligence agencies found it hard to resist the INC’s “defectors” when that would have meant challenging the White House and going against Washington’s conventional wisdom. Rather than take those career chances, many intelligence analysts found it easier to go with the flow.

Referring to the INC’s Source One, a U.S. intelligence memorandum in July 2002 hailed the information as “highly credible and includes reports on a wide range of subjects including conventional weapons facilities, denial and deception; communications security; suspected terrorist training locations; illicit trade and smuggling; Saddam’s palaces; the Iraqi prison system; and Iraqi petrochemical plants.”

Only analysts in the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research were skeptical because they felt Source One was making unfounded assumptions, especially about possible nuclear research sites.

After the invasion of Iraq, U.S. intelligence finally began to recognize the holes in Source One’s stories and spotted examples of analysts extrapolating faulty conclusions from his limited first-hand knowledge.

“In early February 2004, in order to resolve credibility issues with Source One, Intelligence Community elements brought Source One to Iraq,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said. “When taken to the location Source One had described as the suspect [nuclear] facility, he was unable to identify it.
“According to one intelligence assessment, the ‘subject appeared stunned upon hearing that he was standing on the spot that he reported as the location of the facility, insisted that he had never been to that spot, and wanted to check a map’

“Intelligence Community officers confirmed that they were standing on the location he was identifying. During questioning, Source One acknowledged contact with the INC’s Washington Director [redacted], but denied that the Washington Director directed Source One to provide any false information.”

The U.S. intelligence community had mixed reactions to other Iraqi “walk-ins” arranged by the INC. Some were caught in outright deceptions, such as “Source Two” who had talked about Iraq supposedly building mobile biological weapons labs.

After catching Source Two in contradictions, the CIA issued a “fabrication notice” in May 2002, deeming him “a fabricatorprovocateur” and asserting that he had “been coached by the Iraqi National Congress prior to his meeting with western intelligence services.”

However, the DIA never repudiated the specific reports that had been based on Source Two’s debriefings. So, Source Two continued to be cited in five CIA intelligence assessments and the pivotal National Intelligence Estimate in October 2002, “as corroborating other source reporting about a mobile biological weapons program,” the Senate Intelligence Committee report said.

Source Two was one of four human sources referred to by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his United Nations speech on Feb. 5, 2003. When asked how a “fabricator” could have been used for such an important speech, a CIA analyst who worked on Powell’s speech said, “we lost the thread of concern as time progressed I don’t think we remembered.”

A CIA supervisor added, “Clearly we had it at one point, we understood, we had concerns about the source, but over time it started getting used again and there really was a loss of corporate awareness that we had a problem with the source.”

**Flooding Defectors**

Part of the challenge facing U.S. intelligence agencies was the sheer volume of “defectors” shepherded into debriefing rooms by the INC and the appeal of their anti-Hussein information to U.S. policymakers.

“Source Five,” for instance, claimed that Osama bin Laden had traveled to Baghdad for direct meetings with Saddam Hussein. “Source Six” claimed that the Iraqi population was “excited” about the prospects of a U.S. invasion to topple
Hussein. Plus, the source said Iraqis recognized the need for post-invasion U.S. control.

By early February 2003, as the final invasion plans were underway, U.S. intelligence agencies had progressed up to “Source Eighteen,” who came to epitomize what some analysts still suspected that the INC was coaching the sources.

As the CIA tried to set up a debriefing of Source Eighteen, another Iraqi exile passed on word to the agency that an INC representative had told Source Eighteen to “deliver the act of a lifetime.” CIA analysts weren’t sure what to make of that piece of news since Iraqi exiles frequently badmouthed each other but the value of the warning soon became clear.

U.S. intelligence officers debriefed Source Eighteen the next day and discovered that “Source Eighteen was supposed to have a nuclear engineering background, but was unable to discuss advanced mathematics or physics and described types of ‘nuclear’ reactors that do not exist,” according to the Senate Intelligence Committee report.

“Source Eighteen used the bathroom frequently, particularly when he appeared to be flustered by a line of questioning, suddenly remembering a new piece of information upon his return. During one such incident, Source Eighteen appeared to be reviewing notes,” the report said.

Not surprisingly, the CIA and DIA case officers concluded that Source Eighteen was a fabricator. But the sludge of INC-connected misinformation and disinformation continued to ooze through the U.S. intelligence community and to foul the American intelligence product in part because there was little pressure from above demanding strict quality controls.

**Curve Ball**

Other Iraqi exile sources not directly connected to the INC also supplied dubious information, including a source for a foreign intelligence agency who earned the code name “Curve Ball.” He contributed important details about Iraq’s alleged mobile facilities for producing agents for biological warfare.

Tyler Drumheller, former chief of the CIA’s European Division, said his office had issued repeated warnings about Curve Ball’s accounts. “Everyone in the chain of command knew exactly what was happening,” Drumheller said. [Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2005]

Despite those objections and the lack of direct U.S. contact with Curve Ball, he earned a rating as “credible” or “very credible,” and his information became a
core element of the Bush administration’s case for invading Iraq.

Drawings of Curve Ball’s imaginary bio-weapons labs were a central feature of Secretary of State Powell’s presentation to the U.N.

Even after the invasion, U.S. officials continued to promote these claims, portraying the discovery of a couple of trailers used for inflating artillery balloons as “the strongest evidence to date that Iraq was hiding a biological warfare program.” [CIA-DIA report, “Iraqi Mobile Biological Warfare Agent Production Plants,” May 16, 2003]

Finally, on May 26, 2004, a CIA assessment of Curve Ball said “investigations since the war in Iraq and debriefings of the key source indicate he lied about his access to a mobile BW production product.”

The U.S. intelligence community also learned that Curve Ball “had a close relative who had worked for the INC since 1992,” but the CIA could never resolve the question of whether the INC was involved in coaching Curve Ball.

One CIA analyst said she doubted a direct INC role because the INC pattern was to “shop their good sources around town, but they weren’t known for sneaking people out of countries into some asylum system.”

Delayed Report

In September 2006, four years after the Bush administration began fanning the flames for war against Iraq, a majority of Senate Intelligence Committee members overrode the objections of the panel’s senior Republicans and issued a report on the INC’s contribution to the U.S. intelligence failures.

The report concluded that the INC fed false information to the intelligence community to convince Washington that Iraq was flouting prohibitions on WMD production. The panel also found that the falsehoods had been “widely distributed in intelligence products prior to the war” and did influence some American perceptions of the WMD threat in Iraq.

But INC disinformation was not solely to blame for the bogus intelligence that permeated the pre-war debate. In Washington, there had been a breakdown of the normal checks and balances that American democracy has traditionally relied on for challenging and eliminating the corrosive effects of false data.

By 2002, that self-correcting mechanism a skeptical press, congressional oversight, and tough-minded analysts had collapsed. With very few exceptions, prominent journalists refused to put their careers at risk; intelligence professionals played along with the powers that be; Democratic leaders succumbed
to the political pressure to toe the President’s line; and Republicans marched in lockstep with Bush on his way to war.

Because of this systematic failure, the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded four years later that nearly every key assessment of the U.S. intelligence community as expressed in the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate about Iraq’s WMD was wrong:

“Postwar findings do not support the [NIE] judgment that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq’s acquisition of high-strength aluminum tubes was intended for an Iraqi nuclear program; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq was ‘vigorously trying to procure uranium ore and yellowcake’ from Africa; do not support the [NIE] assessment that ‘Iraq has biological weapons’ and that ‘all key aspects of Iraq’s offensive biological weapons program are larger and more advanced than before the Gulf war’; do not support the [NIE] assessment that Iraq possessed, or ever developed, mobile facilities for producing biological warfare agents; do not support the [NIE] assessments that Iraq ‘has chemical weapons’ or ‘is expanding its chemical industry to support chemical weapons production’; do not support the [NIE] assessments that Iraq had a developmental program for an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle ‘probably intended to deliver biological agents’ or that an effort to procure U.S. mapping software ‘strongly suggests that Iraq is investigating the use of these UAVs for missions targeting the United States.’

Now, more than a half decade after the Senate report, one might hope that this cautionary tale of how a dangerous “group think” can lead a nation to war would be remembered by editors, politicians and the public as a similar crescendo of propaganda builds about Iran.

But the opposite seems to be the case. An historical amnesia has taken hold, enabling the same political and career pressures to return. Mainstream journalists fall over themselves to compose scoops about Iran’s WMD just as they did regarding Iraq’s WMD. Politicians compete to out-macho the other when it comes to threatening Iran.

Skepticism toward politicized organizations like the IAEA is nearly nonexistent. The American people are told to be afraid, very afraid. The only significant difference may be that President Barack Obama is less eager for war with Iran than President George W. Bush was regarding war with Iraq.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com).
Iran’s Fear of ‘Regime Change’ War

“Tough-guy-ism” toward Iran holds that only a “credible threat of war” will force Tehran to capitulate to Western demands on its nuclear program. But the real hold-up to a peaceful settlement may be Iran’s fear of “regime change” aggression if it makes too many one-sided concessions, ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar says.

By Paul R. Pillar

Among several broadly held misconceptions about Iran is that to get Iranians to make concessions we want them to make at the negotiating table the United States must credibly threaten to inflict dire harm on them, specifically, with military force, if they do not make the concessions.

Some in the United States (and some in Israel) who are especially keen on promoting this notion would welcome a war. If war preparations and brinksmanship used to communicate such a threat lead the two nations to stumble into an accidental war, and there is a real danger they might, so much the better from their point of view.

But the belief in saber-rattling as an aid to gaining an agreement in the negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program extends to many who actually want an agreement and are not seeking a war. We have heard more about this lately in connection with Chuck Hagel’s nomination to be Secretary of Defense.

People ask whether this nominee, who has evinced an appreciation of the huge downsides of a war with Iran, would be able to rattle the saber as convincingly as the same people think a Secretary of Defense ought to rattle it.

Even the usually thoughtful David Ignatius has adopted this line of thought. In his latest column he makes a comparison with nuclear deterrence in the time of Dwight Eisenhower. Under the doctrine of mutual assured destruction, a “bluff” of “frightening the Soviets with the danger of Armageddon” was used to dissuade them from overrunning Western Europe. “Obama,” says Ignatius, “has a similar challenge with Iran.”

No, he doesn’t. One situation was deterrence of what would have been one of the most epic acts of aggression in history. The other is an effort to compel a far lesser country to curtail or give up an avowedly peaceful program, and to do so by threatening what itself would be an act of aggression.

Thomas Schelling has taught us that deterrence and what he called compellence
have significant differences, with the latter generally being harder to
accomplish than the former. And this is in addition to all the other vast
differences in scale, subject matter and morality between nuclear deterrence
during the early Cold War and the current standoff with Iran.

These and other differences get to one of the problems with the common notion
about threatening military attack in response to Iran not crying uncle at the
conference table: a difficulty in making such a threat credible no matter how
energetic a saber-rattler the Secretary of Defense might be.

This is related also to the question Mr. Obama posed during the election
campaign, about whether his opponent wanted a new war in the Middle East. At the
level of public sentiment, most Americans do not want to become engaged in a new
war in the Middle East.

At the more sophisticated level of policy analysis, if that analysis *is done*
thoroughly and objectively, such a war would be seen to have enormous costs and
disadvantages. One of those disadvantages would be, as members of the opposition
in Iran have repeatedly warned, to strengthen politically Iranian hardliners
whose position is based partly on implacable hostility from the United States
and who would benefit from a rallying around the flag in response to foreign
attack.

Another disadvantage would be the directly counterproductive one of leading the
Iranians to make the decision they probably have not yet made, which is to build
a nuclear weapon.

That last consideration is in turn related to another problem with the notion
about threatening military attack, which concerns the reasons Iranians have for
being interested in nuclear weapons. The chief reason almost certainly involves
the presumed value of such weapons as a deterrent against major, regime-crushing
foreign attack.

The more that the brandishing of the threat of military attack makes such an
attack seem likely, the greater will be the Iranian interest in developing
nuclear weapons and the less inclined they will be to make concessions that
would preclude that possibility.

As if all of this were not enough to discard the notion about the efficacy of
saber-rattling, there are the central realities of the nuclear negotiations
themselves and how Tehran perceives them. Inducing the Iranians to concede is
not just a matter of hurting them more. They already are hurting a lot, from the
economic consequences of international sanctions.

What is missing from the negotiations is any reason for them to believe that the
hurt will be eased if they make concessions. The P5+1 have yet to place on the
table any proposal that includes any significant relief from sanctions. Without
such an incentive, there is no reason for the Iranians to cry uncle or even to
make lesser concessions, no matter how much more they are made to hurt.

The Iranians have good reason to be suspicious of ultimate U.S. and Western
motivations, and threats of military force figure into that in an unhelpful way
too. The Iranians do not have to look far to see ample evidence in favor of the
proposition that the primary U.S. goal regarding Iran is regime change.

And they do not have to look far into the past to see a recent U.S. use of
military force, participation in the intervention in Libya, that overthrew a
Middle Eastern regime after it had reached an agreement with the United States
to give up all its nuclear and other unconventional weapons programs.

What reason would Iranian leaders have to make any concessions if they believe
the same thing is likely to happen to them? This is already a problem; rattling
the saber only makes it worse.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be
one of the agency’s top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown
University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a blog post at
The National Interest’s Web site. Reprinted with author’s permission.)

‘Fixing the Debt’ on Average Folks

Goldman Sachs’ Lloyd Blankfein and other tycoons behind “Fix the Debt” want
average folks to expect less from Social Security and other safety-net
programs but are doing all they can to protect their special interest tax breaks
and dodge the slightly higher tax rates for the rich, note Bill Moyers and
Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

In Paul Krugman’s book, End This Depression Now!, the economist and New York
Times columnist entitles a chapter “The Second Gilded Age” in which he describes
the extraordinary rise in wealth and power of the very rich during this era of
unregulated greed.

Since Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980, the top one percent of Americans have
seen their incomes increase by 275 percent. After accounting for inflation, the
typical hourly wage for a worker has increased just $1.23.

Big Money, as Krugman writes in his book, buys Big Influence. And that’s why the financiers of Wall Street never truly experience regime change, their cash brings both political parties to heel.

So it is that the policies that got us where we are today, in this big ditch of chronic financial depression, have done little for most, but have been very good to a few at the top.

But they’re not satisfied with having only most of it, they want it all. If Krugman were writing his book today, he could find plenty of evidence in the deal that supposedly kept us from going over the fiscal cliff.

Behind closed doors, Congress larded it with corporate tax breaks worth tens of billions of dollars, everything from tax credits for NASCAR racing and the railroads to subsidies for Hollywood, rebates for the rum industry and loopholes for off-shore financing that could help giant multinationals like General Electric avoid billions of dollars in corporate income taxes.

Writing in the conservative Washington Examiner, columnist Tim Carney says many of these expensive giveaways were “spawned by a web of lobbyists, donors and staffers surrounding Democratic Sen. Max Baucus of Montana,” chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. As we know from the Obamacare fight, Baucus is a connoisseur of revolving door corruption.

“Pick any one of the special-interest tax breaks extended by the cliff deal,” Carney wrote, “and you’re likely to find a former Baucus aide who lobbied for it on behalf of a large corporation or industry organization.” Even the pro-business Wall Street Journal was appalled. They called it a “Crony Capitalist Blowout.”

And so it was, and more. It was payback time for all those campaign donations. CEOs and lobbyists were tripping over themselves as they traipsed up and down Pennsylvania Avenue between Congress and the White House.

You’ve no doubt heard about Fix the Debt, that group of business execs and retired politicians taking out TV ads and campaigning to slash the deficit. In The New York Times, Nick Confessore reported, “close to half of the members of Fix the Debt's board and steering committee have ties to companies that have engaged in lobbying on taxes and spending, often to preserve tax breaks and other special treatment.”

Get it? They’re privately protecting their interests as they publicly urge austerity on everyone else.
Lloyd Blankfein, CEO and chair of the global investment giant Goldman Sachs, is on Fix the Debt’s Fiscal Leadership Council. Here’s what he said when asked by CBS News’ Scott Pelley about how he would reduce the federal deficit:

“You’re going to have to undoubtedly do something to lower people’s expectations, the entitlements and what people think that they’re going to get, because it’s not going to, they’re not going to get it. Social Security wasn’t devised to be a system that supported you for a 30-year retirement after a 25-year career. In general, entitlements have to be slowed down and contained.”

Yes, but Blankfein and Goldman Sachs make sure their entitlements aren’t touched! Here’s the story: After 9/11, Congress created tax-exempt Liberty Zone bonds to help small businesses rebuild near Ground Zero. Turns out Goldman’s friends in high places consider it a small business, too, although it made $5.6 billion in profits last year.

As the fiscal cliff fiasco was playing out over New Year’s Eve, faster than the ball dropped in Times Square, a deal was struck that will extend the subsidies for Goldman’s fancy new headquarters in lower Manhattan. In their 43 stories of glass and steel, and a footprint two city blocks long, Goldman Sachs reigns supreme thanks to a system rigged by and for the powerful rich.

And then, according to The Wall Street Journal, just before the fiscal cliff deal’s higher individual tax rates kicked in, Goldman handed “Lloyd Blankfein and his top lieutenants a total of $65 million in restricted stock”, bonuses awarded a month earlier than usual so they could all beat the coming tax hike from which they have been spared for more than ten lucrative years.

It won’t surprise you to learn that, “Corporations announced more special dividends last month than in any other December since at least 1955.” Doing everything they can to avoid helping pay off the debt their CEOs have been urging Congress to cut.

As for working people, tough luck. Because the fiscal cliff deal ends the cut in payroll taxes, the average worker this year will take home about a thousand dollars less.

Bill Moyers is managing editor and Michael Winship is senior writer of the weekly public affairs program, “Moyers & Company,” airing on public television. Check local airtimes or comment at www.BillMoyers.com.
America’s Bloody Price for Power

**Exclusive:** “The Untold History of the United States” shakes up the traditional recounting of the last century, forcing Americans to rethink key assumptions, but director Oliver Stone and historian Peter Kuznick have not written a people’s history, says Jim DiEugenio in part two of his review.

By Jim DiEugenio

It’s challenging to review a book like *The Untold History of the United States* by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, with its broad sweep covering more than a century from the late 19th to the early 21st centuries especially given the authors’ ambition to reorder how Americans see their nation as it evolved into a global empire and force them to confront how that empire has trampled on the lives and dreams of other people.

Without doubt, there is much value in their effort, which you can also watch in a Showtime documentary series by the same name. It is always good when a serious work comes out that shakes the pillars of the historical establishment by challenging cherished conventional wisdoms. Director Stone and historian Kuznick surely do that.

But the inevitable selection process emphasizing one historical turning point over another and indeed omitting some pivotal moments altogether invites criticism. And that is true about the second half of this book and series as it was the first half, which I reviewed earlier.

The second half of the 750-page book covers U.S. history from the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson to Barack Obama. And much like the first half, this 50-year sweep of history is more a reshuffling of the official top-down history than a
people’s history in the vein of Howard Zinn, who focused more on the popular struggles that invigorated American democracy from the bottom up, rather than on the machinations of the political and economic elites.

Stone and Kuznick see themselves in Zinn’s genre as they note near the end of the book when they write: “What had become apparent [during President Obama’s first term] was that the real hope for changing the United States for helping it regain its democratic, egalitarian, and revolutionary soul lay in U.S. citizens joining with the rebellious masses everywhere to deploy the lessons of history, their history, the people’s history, which is no longer untold, and demand creation of a world that represents the interests of the overwhelming majority, not that of the wealthiest, greediest, and most powerful.”

But the absence of a real people’s history in the Stone/Kuznick book i.e. chronicling the struggle of downtrodden Americans and the political strategies of what might called the Left is a central flaw in the book and TV series. The ups and downs of such a movement are barely mentioned. Remarkably, the book omits the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and treats the murder of Robert F. Kennedy in a cursory fashion.

**Right’s Propaganda**

The Stone/Kuznick emphasis on the maneuverings among the elites also gives short-shrift to the well-funded out-reach by the modern Right to propagandize and recruit millions of Americans into the causes of “free enterprise” boosterism and “national security” flag-waving.

For instance, there’s no reference to the seminal 1971 memo by corporate lawyer (and later U.S. Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell urging businesses and the well-to-do to invest in an ideological infrastructure to make their case to the American people and to their representatives. Amid a resurgent anti-war Left, the Powell memo was an organizational call to arms for the Right to occupy Washington with think tanks, lobbying groups and media echo chambers designed to move the debate to the center-right.

The remarkable success of Powell’s recommendations carried forward by the likes of former Treasury Secretary Bill Simon and a variety of right-wing foundation executives and media moguls was made even more pronounced by the simultaneous, post-Vietnam War retreat by the American Left in its own media outreach to the broader public.

Just as the Left was dismantling much of its then-impressive media from Ramparts magazine to Dispatch News to hundreds of underground newspapers and radio stations the Right was gearing up a multi-billion-dollar propaganda
infrastructure to rally much of the public, especially middle- and working-class whites, behind a banner of fewer social programs for the poor, lower taxes on the rich, super-patriotism abroad and union-busting at home.

The Right’s money, energy and ruthlessness also pushed the mainstream news media in that direction, further isolating the Left and making reactionary ideas seem more and more acceptable.

Why this omission is so significant to the Stone/Kuznick book is that it was the absence of a powerful people’s movement on the Left with only a few flurries of notable mass activism during the latter decades of the 20th Century that made the nation’s shift to the Right in the 1980s and beyond so seemingly effortless.

The absence of a strong people’s movement on the Left also made it difficult, if not impossible, for somewhat liberal national leaders to move the country back toward its more progressive tendencies. But Stone/Kuznick tend to portray Democratic presidents such as Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama as sellouts to the corporate power structure rather than as frustrated social reformers operating in an intensely hostile political environment.

Their mostly unsuccessful attempts to address national concerns from alternative energy to health care are treated as bungled or insincere. The authors dump the blame on these presidents, rather than spreading the fault to the structural weaknesses of the Left, which by then had lost much of its capacity to connect with the American public and to promote politically feasible reforms.

In other words, the book and documentary series are almost the opposite of a people’s history. They do reference somewhat the impact of the powerful people’s movements of the early parts of the last century the union movement of the 1930s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s, the anti-war movement of the 1960s but then the authors ignore the other side of the equation: how the dissipation and division of the Left from the 1970s onward contributed to the Right’s resurgence.

Vietnam and Beyond

The second half of the Stone/Kuznick collaboration essentially starts with the presidency of Lyndon Johnson in a chapter entitled, “Empire Derailed.” The reference is to what happened with Johnson’s strategy of escalation in Vietnam, but I would dispute certain aspects of their presentation.

For instance, they write that LBJ bought into the fanciful intelligence accounts that showed America was winning the war. This is not entirely accurate. As John Newman shows in JFK and Vietnam, in March 1962, Vice President Johnson was getting the real story of how the American effort was failing to adequately halt
the progress of the Viet Cong. Johnson’s military aide, Howard Burris was passing the reports to LBJ. (Newman, pgs. 225-27)

But the point is that, early on, Johnson knew about the failure of American advisers to turn the tide. President John F. Kennedy wanted McNamara to use (knowingly false) optimistic reports so he could announce that, since the situation on the ground was going well, the U.S. could withdraw. As Newman notes, Kennedy could then plan his withdrawal timetable around the 1964 election. The hawkish Johnson, understanding what Kennedy was doing, would paint a rosy picture in public. (Virtual JFK, by James Light, pgs. 304-10)

But secretly Johnson was doing something Kennedy would not countenance: He was drawing up war plans so the American military could save the day. (Gordon Goldstein, Lessons in Disaster, p 108) After Kennedy was killed and Johnson had won the 1964 election, Johnson would waste little time in implementing these plans. The first American combat troops landed at Da Nang in March 1965, two months after Johnson’s inauguration.

The escalation continued until 1967, when American troop levels peaked at around 540,000 combat troops. This massive effort was capsized by the Tet offensive of January 1968. Tet showed that 1.) American intelligence in Vietnam was not working since there was almost no warning about Tet from the CIA, and 2.) Even with over half a million troops in country, the Viet Cong could attack almost all the major cities in South Vietnam, including the State Department compound in Saigon.

At that point, Johnson tried to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict, hoping to get a peace settlement before the 1968 election. He was on the verge of a breakthrough by October. The authors then note that Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon used China Lobby activist Anna Chennault as a back channel to the leaders of South Vietnam to get them to boycott Johnson’s peace talks by promising a better deal for them under a Nixon presidency, thus sabotaging the possibility of an “October Surprise” peace deal that would cinch the presidential election for Democratic candidate, Vice President Hubert Humphrey. (Stone and Kuznick, pgs. 358-59)

The Stone/Kuznick book notes that Johnson discovered Nixon’s sabotage before the election. But they are not specific about how LBJ found out about these secret contacts or what he did with the evidence. As journalist Robert Parry has noted, LBJ first found out about Nixon’s plan to “block” the peace talks from the private discussions of a Wall Street banker in Nixon’s camp who was placing bets on stocks and bonds based on his inside knowledge that Nixon was making sure Johnson’s peace talks failed. Johnson then confirmed the conspiracy through NSA and FBI wiretaps. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “LBJ’s ‘X-File’ on Nixon’s
But Stone and Kuznick then do something odd: They blame Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey for not exposing this chicanery. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 359) However, the evidence that Parry uncovered at the LBJ Library in Austin, Texas, revealed that Johnson personally weighed the possibility of disclosing Nixon’s sabotage before the election.

Johnson even confronted Nixon about it. Nixon quite predictably lied about his knowledge of any scheme. Johnson then discussed going public with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, national security adviser Walt Rostow and Defense Secretary Clark Clifford on Nov. 4, 1968, the day before the election. This circle decided to stay silent for what Clifford deemed “the good of the country.”

After Nixon narrowly won the election and Johnson was still unable to revive his hoped-for peace settlement Johnson still kept this dark secret to himself, though privately bitter about what he called Nixon’s “treason.” From this new information it’s clear that the decision not to go public was made by President Johnson, not Humphrey. [See Robert Parry’s America’s Stolen Narrative.]

Also regarding that election year, Stone and Kuznick call 1968 “one of the most extraordinary years of the century,” but then mention Robert Kennedy’s assassination in just one sentence and ignore the fact that his death took place just two months after Martin Luther King was killed under suspicious circumstances in Memphis. (See page 357)

Not only does the book not mention how close these two deaths were in time, or how they impacted the presidential election that year, it does not mention the murder of King (or Malcolm X) at all. This is surprising, since the impact on America of those three deaths was quite estimable.

**Nixon’s Presidency**

The book then picks up with the presidency of Richard Nixon. The chapter starts with the secret bombing of Cambodia. As told by William Shawcross in his memorable tome Sideshow, this secret, illegal operation had truly horrendous implications. It caused the fall of Prime Minister Sihanouk to General Lon Nol. Sihanouk then supported the communist rebels called the Khmer Rouge, who deposed Lon Nol in 1975 and thus began one of the greatest extermination programs in history. Yet, Stone and Kuznick do not make this connection.

The authors do spend time discussing the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile. Both Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger were very much concerned with Allende’s coming to power in Chile and pressured the CIA to come up with some method of stopping his election.
The CIA, led in this effort by field officer David Phillips dumped millions of dollars into an anti-Allende propaganda campaign in the Chilean election of 1970. What made this rather unusual was that Chile had a history of being a democratic country. Allende also won the election fairly.

But there were economic interests who tried to influence Kissinger to still take action. Two of them were David Rockefeller, whose family held a strong interest in Anaconda Copper, and John McConen, a board member of ITT. Both men lobbied the White House, and President Nixon made clear to CIA Director Richard Helms that sabotaging Allende was a priority operation. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 373)

After Allende exposed this U.S. interference in a speech to the UN in December 1972, the Nixon administration redoubled its efforts to oust Allende. Strikes and anti-Allende demonstrations began in earnest. As they grew, Phillips ordered his military agents to launch a revolt. Led by General Augusto Pinochet, on Sept. 11, 1973, they started bombing the presidential palace and troops stormed the building, resulting in Allende’s death.

No one really knows how many followers of Allende were killed in the aftermath of the coup. But Pinochet’s reign of murder reached all the way into Washington, D.C., where his agents collaborating with CIA-connected Cuban exiles killed former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier and an American female co-worker with a car bomb in 1976. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 378)

This terrorist strike was part of Operation Condor, a collaboration among right-wing governments in South America’s Southern Cone to track down dissidents anywhere in the world and assassinate them. Together these regimes launched a huge program of repression throughout South America and eventually into Central America. Estimates as to how many of their targets were killed range into the tens of thousands. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 378)

Nixon’s Downfall

Stone and Kuznick note the impact of the publication of the Pentagon Papers by the New York Times in June 1971, as marking the start of what evolved into the Watergate scandal. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 386) Yet, new research shows that Nixon’s creation of the Plumbers connected back to his 1968 sabotage of the Vietnam peace talks and his fear that a missing file on his scheme might surface and cause a firestorm similar to or worse than the Pentagon Papers, which dealt mostly with Democratic lies from 1945 to 1967.

To recover the missing file, which Nixon mistakenly thought was at the Brookings Institution, Nixon authorized the creation of a team of burglars in June 1971 led by ex-CIA operative E. Howard Hunt. However, their black-bag operations ran
aground when part of the team was captured inside the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate building on June 17, 1972, beginning the foundering of Nixon’s president which ended with his force resignation on Aug. 9, 1974.

Stone and Kuznick give Nixon deserved credit for recognizing China and trying to get arms agreements with the Soviets. The latter was called the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty, or SALT. As the authors note, Nixon’s attempts to halt the growth of nuclear arms was met with a decisive backlash by his critics on the Right, including Albert Wohlstetter, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and Paul Nitze who formed a group called the Committee on the Present Danger.

They insisted that any arms negotiation was a poor idea because the Russians were ahead of the United States in the arms race (which was untrue). Although the authors do not mention this, one could observe that this resistance to Nixon’s détente his lessening of tensions with the Soviet Union marked the real beginning of the neoconservative movement, as the Right drew in disgruntled Democratic war hawks and poured millions of dollars into its rapidly expanding infrastructure of Washington-based pressure groups.

By not noting this, the authors miss an opportunity to put into context the sharp rightward shift of U.S. foreign policy over the next four decades. After Nixon’s Watergate-driven resignation, President Gerald Ford came under increasing pressure from a more militant Right to ditch the détente of Nixon and Kissinger. Two of the hardliners inside Ford’s administration were White House chief of staff Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

With the acquiescence of CIA Director George H.W. Bush, Rumsfeld also helped set up Team B, an appendage to the Committee on the Present Danger which was allowed to dispute the nuanced claims of CIA analysts about the nuclear threat posed by the Soviets. (See Jerry Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis, p. 203) Team B insisted on the most alarmist analysis imaginable and questioned the patriotism of CIA analysts who were seeing signs of Soviet decline.

Thus, began the politicization of intelligence that escalated during the Reagan era when 33 members of the Committee on the Present Danger were hired into the government. So many CIA analysts were purged for not hyping the Soviet menace that the agency later missed the collapse of the Soviet bloc entirely.

The Carter Years

The Stone/Kuznick discussion of Jimmy Carter begins with the influence on him by his national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who helped form the Trilateral Commission at the request of banker David Rockefeller. It was supposed to link the leaders of the three most economically advanced areas of
the world: Japan, Western Europe and the U.S. Brzezinski served as its director from 1973-76 and invited Carter to join, an invitation that had fateful results.

In 1977, after defeating Ford, President Carter hired Brzezinski as NSC adviser. From that position, Brzezinski asserted strong influence over Carter, who had limited experience in foreign policy. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 405) Brzezinski’s hard-line stance against the Soviet Union also created tension with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance who wanted to continue in the tradition of Nixon and Kissinger, using détente to get more arms agreements.

Brzezinski wanted Carter to be more hardnosed about détente in pursuit of arms limitation. He felt that by pursuing a human rights agenda, especially in Eastern Europe, Carter could put the Russians on the spot and loosen their grip there, which turned out to be a fairly sound strategy.

But where Brzezinski and his friendship with Rockefeller failed Carter was in the Middle East. David Rockefeller’s Chase Manhattan Bank handled billions of dollars in the Shah of Iran’s money and thus had a strong incentive to bolster ties between Carter and the repressive Shah.

In 1977 when the Shah visited Washington, he stayed at the White House and was effusively praised by the American President, raising questions about Carter’s real commitment to human rights. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 409) Carter then visited Tehran where demonstrations against the Shah were just beginning. He toasted the Shah by saying, “There is no leader with whom I have a deeper sense of personal gratitude and personal friendship.” (ibid)

Through 1978, the Tehran strikes and demonstrations persisted and grew larger. By the end of the year, they had paralyzed the city. The Shah left Iran on Jan. 16, 1979. The exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose resistance to the Shah had inspired many of the demonstrators, returned two weeks later. On April 1, Iran voted by national referendum to become an Islamic Republic based upon Sharia law.

As Stone and Kuznick note, getting blindsided by these developments was a U.S. intelligence failure of the first order with the CIA missing both the Shah’s rapid collapse and the rise of a religious leader who would install Islamic law.

While the Iranian drama played out across U.S. televisions, what most Americans didn’t understand was where the orgiastic hate for America came from. Why did so many Iranians denounce the United States as the Great Satan? It was a case of blowback from the CIA’s 1953 coup against Iranian nationalist leader Mohammad Mossadegh.

The Rockefeller Connection
The Rockefeller-Brzezinski relationship also came into play regarding the Shah’s travels in exile. Faced with losing the lucrative Iranian accounts and under pressure from the Shah’s twin sister to assist her brother in finding a suitable home Rockefeller launched an extraordinary campaign of influence-peddling to pressure Carter to admit the Shah to the United States, a move Carter resisted out of fear it would prompt the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

David Rockefeller’s full-court lobbying campaign brought in former NSC adviser Henry Kissinger and powerful attorney John McCloy of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy. Codenamed Project Alpha, the lobbying was personally paid for by David Rockefeller. (Kai Bird, *The Chairman*, p. 644) Rockefeller even paid a writer $40,000 to pen a book defending the Shah against his critics.

After an Oval Office meeting with David Rockefeller, Carter wrote in his diary: “The main purpose of this visit, apparently, is to try and induce me to let the Shah come into our country. Rockefeller, Kissinger, and Brzezinski seem to be adopting this as a joint project.” (ibid, p. 645)

When private entreaties to Carter did not work, Project Alpha expanded its reach. McCloy began to write letters to Secretary of State Vance and his Deputy Warren Christopher. (ibid, p. 646) The strategy began to work. One by one, Project Alpha converted Carter’s entourage and eventually Carter was surrounded.

In mid-October 1979, the Shah was in Cuernavaca, Mexico when David Rockefeller’s assistant called Cy Vance and told him that the Shah had cancer and needed treatment in America. (ibid, p. 651) Besieged from without and within, Carter finally relented and let the Shah into the United States, but not before he added one acutely prophetic pronouncement to everyone in the room who was urging him to do this: “What are you guys going to advise me to do if they overrun our embassy and take our people hostage?” (ibid, p. 652)

This was a pivotal moment in modern American history because it set the stage for the rise of Ronald Reagan as president.

The Shah checked into a hospital in New York on Oct. 22, 1979. Less than two weeks later, Iranian militants stormed the American embassy and took hostage almost 70 employees. The U.S. news media treated the crisis as nearly an equivalent to war with the hostage issue dominating news cycle after news cycle. Each night, Ted Koppel broadcast his own summary of what had happened that day in the hostage crisis.

As the crisis dragged on, Carter’s approval ratings plummeted to the mid-forties. The only way out seemed to be a miraculous rescue of the hostages. An
attempt was made by a special commando group in April 1980, but failed when a helicopter collided with a refueling plane in the Iranian desert, leaving eight Americans dead. Secretary of State Vance, who opposed the scheme, resigned.

After Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in September 1980, Carter said he would grant Iran the hundreds of millions in arms that had been purchased by the previous regime if they would return the American hostages. The team behind Republican candidate Ronald Reagan began to smell an ‘October Surprise’ (Stone and Kuznick, p. 420)

Stone/Kuznick, relying on the work of former NSC official Gary Sick and journalist Robert Parry, do a brief but pointed précis about the subject. They write that “it appears that Reagan campaign officials met with Iranian leaders and promised to allow Israel to ship arms to Iran if Iran would hold the hostages until Reagan won the election.” (ibid)

The authors cite a secret Russian report that was solicited by Rep. Lee Hamilton (and later disclosed by Parry) as evidence that several Reagan higher-ups had a series of secret meetings in Europe in which they promised the Iranians more military aid than Carter if the hostage release would be delayed until Reagan won the election. Reagan did win and, on Jan. 20, 1981, immediately after he was sworn in as President, Iran released the U.S. Embassy personnel.

Combined, the two tainted elections of 1968 and 1980 launched the United States on a rightward path that would continue into the next century.

Reagan’s Death Squads

The Stone/Kuznick chapter on President Ronald Reagan is entitled, “The Reagan Years: Death Squads for Democracy,” and is one of the best short treatments I have seen of those years.

Aligning himself with the alarmist Committee on the Present Danger, Reagan proclaimed, “We’re in greater danger today than we were after Pearl Harbor. Our military is absolutely incapable of defending this country.” (Stone/Kuznick, p. 436) Thus began one of the largest peacetime defense build-ups in American history.

Under the influence of the supply-side school of economics, this was accompanied by a lowering of the top income tax rate from 70 percent to 28 percent. This combination of profligate military spending and large tax cuts caused annual national deficits that were unprecedented at the time and created pressure to slash programs benefiting the poor.

With hardliner William Casey put in charge of the CIA, intelligence analysts
came under even more pressure to hype the Soviet threat. Anyone who detected cracks in the Soviet bloc could expect to be marginalized while young careerists, like Robert Gates, climbed the ladder into top CIA jobs by enforcing the new Soviets-are-on-the-march orthodoxy that justified ever-more military spending.

Reagan’s foreign policy team also focused on what they insisted was growing Soviet influence in Central America. Reagan sent $5 billion in aid to El Salvador, where right-wing leader Roberto D’Aubuisson was running death squads in the employ of wealthy landowners and the U.S.-trained military was conducting its own massacres of peasants.

One of the worst atrocities took place at the village of El Mozote, where a Salvadoran army battalion systematically slaughtered hundreds of civilians, including young children. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 432) When *New York Times* reporter Ray Bonner exposed this atrocity, the *Wall Street Journal* and other right-wing periodicals began to attack his credibility. The *Times* buckled and pulled Bonner off his Central America assignment.

Even though these slaughters continued, Reagan kept on supplying El Salvador and other right-wing governments in the region with large grants in aid. The whole time, Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams kept discounting reporting like Bonner’s as being “not credible.” (ibid, p. 433)

Concurrently, Reagan had the CIA collaborate with Argentina’s right-wing intelligence service in training and financing a group of rebels in Nicaragua to wage war on that country’s leftist government which had overthrown longtime dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979. This CIA/Argentine-manufactured group was called the Contras.

However, the problem facing Reagan was that Congress passed the Boland Amendment, which outlawed military aid to the Contras. In his contempt for this congressional constraint on his powers, Reagan authorized an extra-constitutional Contra-support operation that was hidden from Congress and the American people. By 1985, Reagan also was secretly selling arms to Iran to get its help in freeing American hostages who had been seized in Lebanon.

As Stone and Kuznick describe the resulting scandal, CIA Director Casey and NSC official Oliver North sold the missiles to Iran at exorbitant prices and used some of the profits to fund the Contras. But Stone and Kuznick only take a glancing look at another important funding source for the Contras, their collaboration “with Latin American drug dealers often serving as intermediaries and receiving easier access to US markets in return.” (p. 431) As we know from the reporting of Brian Barger, Robert Parry and the late Gary Webb, this was
another important angle to the scandal.

Reagan’s off-books operations were finally exposed in fall 1986 and his administration was rocked for some months by the Iran-Contra scandal. However, an aggressive cover-up that largely shifted blame to North, Casey and other subordinates spared Reagan and his Vice President George H.W. Bush from serious political damage. With the Right’s propaganda apparatus fully engaged in counterattacking and discrediting investigators, timid Democrats and the mainstream news media largely accepted the Iran-Contra cover stories, no matter how implausible.

Stone and Kuznick do a nice job in describing another chief goal of the Reagan administration, the eradication of the so-called “Vietnam Syndrome,” the nation’s reluctance to get dragged into another overseas conflict. Reagan got that process started with an easy invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada.

The effort was later picked up by President George H.W. Bush with his invasion of Panama in 1989 and the First Persian Gulf War in 1990-91 after which Bush declared, “we’ve kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.”

The Soviets Give Up

The book discusses the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton under the title, “The Cold War Ends: Squandered Opportunities.” A key point of this section and the latter half of the book is that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev deserves the lion’s share of the credit for bringing the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion. Stone and Kuznick call him, with much justice, the most visionary and transformative leader of the 20th Century.

In that sense, Stone/Kuznick reprise a major theme of the book’s first half, which faults U.S. history for exaggerating the American role in winning World War II while denying proper credit to the Soviets for breaking the back of the German war machine. Regarding the end of the Cold War, the authors argue that American conventional wisdom is mistaken in overstating Reagan’s role and undervaluing what Gorbachev did.

Stone/Kuznick assert that this distortion of history then led to a series of other miscalculations that have proved costly for the United States and the world, particularly by thrusting the triumphant neoconservatives into foreign policy dominance and letting them push a preemptive war strategy that sought to maintain the United States as the world’s only superpower forever.

In December 1988, Gorbachev announced that the Cold War was over. He let go of two sectors of the Eastern Bloc: Poland and the Baltics, i.e. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 468) Then East Germany collapsed and the
Berlin Wall was torn down. In return for Soviet non-intervention, Gorbachev wanted an end to both the Warsaw Pact and NATO. America did not comply, and NATO began expanding eastward.

Still, Gorbachev continued to negotiate with the United States until he was deposed by a hard-line coup in 1991. The pro-communist coup was, in turn, defeated by the pro-capitalistic forces under Boris Yeltsin. As American free-market ideologues descended on Russia as advisers, the Russian economy collapsed and corrupt oligarchs plundered the country’s wealth through privatization.

The stage was set for the United States to operate within a uni-polar world and without the constraints of a competing superpower.

With the Soviet Union gone, President George H.W. Bush and America’s triumphalist Right also celebrated the collapse of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, a pyrrhic victory that replaced a secular communist regime with a corrupt Islamic one, eventually opening the way for the Taliban and the use of Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda terrorists.

But the neocons also remained obsessed with removing Iraq’s Saddam Hussein once and for all and supposedly transforming Iraq into a pro-American, pro-Israeli bastion in the heart of the Arab world. President Bill Clinton received a letter from the neocon Project for the New American Century, which urged him to overthrow Saddam by force, a step that Clinton refused to take although ratcheting up sanctions and other actions short of an all-out invasion. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 492)

The Bush Disaster

The book spends only two pages on the Florida election debacle of 2000, which I think deserved more since it was this stolen election that installed George W. Bush instead of Al Gore in the White House. The Stone/Kuznick treatment of this fateful development suffers in comparison to the space they gave to Henry Wallace’s ouster as Vice President by the Democratic convention in 1944. But the sparse recounting fits with the Stone/Kuznick general disdain for modern-day Democratic leaders as not significantly different from the right-wing and neocon Republicans.

The discussion of George W. Bush’s presidency begins with his initial failure to investigate the causes of the 9/11 attacks. Then, once he was prodded to do something, he tried to appoint Henry Kissinger to run the inquiry. Not even today’s mainstream news media would buy that one.

The 9/11 Commission was finally put together under Republican Thomas Kean and the ever-accommodating Democrat Lee Hamilton. But a bigger problem was that the
director, Philip Zelikow, was a close friend and colleague of Bush’s National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, who ranked as one of the most negligent officials in the whole tragedy.

Meanwhile, in the White House, the race was on to blame Saddam for the 9/11 attacks and elevate the inexperienced Bush into the status of a heroic wartime president leading a new kind of war, against not just a country or even an ideology, but a tactic: terrorism. Law professor John Yoo was brought in to devise some legal language for circumventing the Geneva agreements and making torture legal. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 501) The CIA then geared up its “black sites” for its “enhanced interrogations” including waterboarding.

After brushing aside offers from the Taliban to cooperate in turning over bin Laden, Bush ordered an invasion of Afghanistan that ousted the Taliban but failed to capture bin Laden, who escaped from his base in Tora Bora as Bush ordered the U.S. military to begin a premature pivot toward invading Iraq.

Relying on the imposing right-wing propaganda infrastructure and the co-opted mainstream media a public-relations campaign was then utilized to shift the focus of 9/11 anger onto Saddam Hussein, who was actually an enemy of al-Qaeda. The excuse for the U.S. invasion became weapons of mass destruction that Saddam didn’t have.

The authors make a good case that many people had to know this was phony. After all, Saddam’s son-in-law had told U.S. and UN officials that Saddam had destroyed all of his chemical and biological weapons after the first Gulf War. (ibid, p. 517) However, the cowed analysts at the CIA and the flag-waving national press corps rallied behind the war effort.

The three-week-long invasion captured Baghdad in April 2003, driving Saddam from power but failing to locate any WMD. The neocons, who had pushed so hard for the war, assumed that the joy of victory would overwhelm any questions about the false pretenses for war. But the occupation proved much harder and far bloodier than the neocons had assumed. The United States found itself facing a tough insurgency. The total cost of the war, as estimated by economist Joseph Stiglitz, would exceed $1 trillion. (Stone and Kuznick, p. 528)

The costs of the Iraq War, the huge budget deficits, and the real estate and stock market collapses of 2007-08 drove Bush’s approval ratings down to 22 percent by the time he left office in 2009. However, the bigger problem was the global recession that was unleashed by Bush’s multiple miscalculations.

The Obama Disappointment

Stone and Kuznick begin their chapter on Barack Obama by implying that the new
Democratic president had a great opportunity to change things upon taking office, but didn’t take advantage of it. “The country Obama inherited was indeed in shambles, but Obama took a bad situation and, in certain ways, made it worse,” they write. (pp. 549-551)

They run down the litany of Obama’s supposed betrayals, from privately financing his election campaign to treating the Wall Street banks too leniently to forgoing prosecutions of the Bush administration’s war crimes to cracking down on national security leaks, including the incarceration of Pvt. Bradley Manning for releasing thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks.

“If Manning had committed war crimes instead of exposing them, he would be a free man today,” Stone/Kuznich write. (ibid, p. 562)

However, the authors give Obama little leeway for the desperate situation that he confronted, a world economy in freefall, two open-ended wars, and a Washington media and political establishment still invested in many of the neoconservative and free-market policies of the previous decade not to mention an American Left that had little independent capability to influence the broader public.

Also, as the first African-American president, Obama was operating in an extremely hostile environment with not only little policy support within the Establishment and a weak progressive movement but facing the emergence of gun-toting Tea Party activists egged on by the likes of Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh.

After hundreds of pages of Stone/Kuznich putting into context the actions of historical players as disparate as Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy to Josef Stalin and Fidel Castro, the authors made little effort to do the same for Obama. His hard-fought battle to expand health-care for millions of Americans is treated more as a sell-out than the best-he-could-get compromise in the face of unified Republican opposition.

I have made some criticisms in my long review of this book, and I could have made more. But overall, I believe this is a worthy volume to read and to keep. Some sections are eye-opening. Indeed, the book would be revelatory for many Americans who have subsisted on the junk food of “we’re number one” propaganda for too many years. For that, I am glad this book exists.

Jim DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His new book is *Destiny Betrayed* (Second Edition) from Skyhorse Publishing.