

The GOP Knows Power

Special Report: Today's Republican Party doesn't believe in democracy, at least not when an election is decided by the votes of blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and young urban whites comfortable with multiculturalism. Then, the outcome is deemed illegitimate and deserves obstruction, as Robert Parry explains.

By Robert Parry

Many Washington pundits are scratching their heads over Republican refusal to budge hardly at all in the face of electoral reversals in 2012 whether on the budget, judicial appointments or other initiatives from reelected President Barack Obama. But that confusion misses a fundamental fact about the modern GOP: it is contemptuous of the public will and the democratic process.

Indeed, looking back over the last half century as today's Republican Party was stitched together, the common thread has been a readiness to manipulate elections through dirty tricks, deceptions or the disenfranchisement of voting blocs seen as likely to support the Democratic Party. These strategies weave through GOP actions involving Executive, Legislative or Judicial authority, at both the federal and state levels.

You can see this Republican approach today in voter suppression schemes, aggressive gerrymandering of House districts, expansive use of Senate filibusters, and nasty media outlets that rely on disinformation and propaganda, rather than facts and reason.

Though these tactics didn't stop Obama's reelection and failed to recapture the Senate for the GOP, the tricks did help Republicans keep control of the House despite losing that national popular vote by more than one million ballots. Now, the combination of the undemocratic outcome in the House and the unprecedented use of filibusters in the Senate looks certain to block Obama's agenda and the expressed will of the American people for the next two years at least.

Meanwhile, the Republican-controlled Supreme Court may decide to let the very wealthy buy up even more of the U.S. political process and permit GOP-controlled states to further tilt the electoral playing field against blacks, Hispanics and Asian-Americans by gutting the Voting Rights Act.

All these anti-democratic measures seem to elicit no sense of shame among Republicans, whose concept of freedom and liberty seems to envision "freedom" for whites to rule in perpetuity and "liberty" for the wealthy to prosper at the

expense of nearly everyone else.

Mitt Romney's behind-the-scenes contempt for "the 47 percent" who get government assistance and Paul Ryan's infatuation with Ayn Rand's theories about the "makers and takers" represent the real views of the Republican Party, even as it panders rhetorically to lower-income "cultural conservatives" who often depend on government help for everything from aid to care for disabled kids to scooters for zipping around shopping malls.

To maintain effective control of the country even without majority support Republican leaders simply have to suck in a sizeable percentage of average white voters with appeals to their fears about the "others" taking away their right to celebrate Christmas, their "Second Amendment right" to carry whatever firearm they want wherever they want, their right to be protected against "the gay agenda," their right to believe that the science of global warming is a hoax, etc.

Nixon's Baby

This alliance between the well-to-do Establishment and the easily manipulated Know-Nothings can be traced back to Richard Nixon and the hardboiled "realists" who surrounded him in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the likes of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and media consultant Roger Ailes.

Kissinger had no compunction about manipulating or destroying democratic systems abroad, if they were viewed as somehow threatening to American power, with Chile being a prime example. So, in the name of that same power, he didn't hesitate to help constrain populist impulses at home. Ailes and other propaganda experts understood how to build a media machine to push all the right buttons of the average white guy.

The end result of these tactics was the securing and maintenance of power for Republicans. From a purely Machiavellian viewpoint, one had to feel a measure of admiration for the sheer audacity and ruthlessness by which the modern Republican Party played this power game.

For instance, with their control of the levers of American power within reach in fall 1968, Nixon and Kissinger saw nothing wrong with undermining President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks, a move Johnson discovered and called "treason." However, LBJ chose not to expose what Nixon and his team had done.

Yet, having secured the 1968 election by sabotaging Johnson's peace talks and thus extending the war, Nixon grew alarmed at the intensity and radicalization of the U.S. anti-war and the black-power movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. So, Nixon authorized extraordinary steps to spy on and disrupt those

popular uprisings.

A savvy political thinker, Nixon also spotted an opportunity to exploit the white racist backlash toward black civil rights by appealing to those resentments in a “Southern strategy” aimed at whites who opposed African-American advances. Nixon’s playing of the race card brought the states of the Old Confederacy into the Republican fold.

Fear of Exposure

In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg’s leaking of the Pentagon Papers secret history of the Vietnam War from 1945 to 1967 and the decision of major U.S. newspapers to publish this classified record represented another shock to Nixon’s view of the proper order.

Plus, the public outrage over those official lies stirred Nixon’s fears that a missing White House file containing the FBI wiretaps of his own treachery in 1968 could threaten his political future if that file surfaced as a sequel to the Pentagon Papers, arguably even more infuriating and explosive.

We now know, based on declassified archival records, that a bitter President Johnson ordered his national security aide Walt Rostow to take the file when Johnson left the White House in January 1969. Subsequently, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover told Nixon about the file, but Kissinger and White House chief of staff H.R. “Bob” Haldeman couldn’t find it.

After the New York Times began publishing the Pentagon Papers in June 1971, Nixon ordered a resumption of the search, including the formation of a burglary team headed by ex-CIA officer E. Howard Hunt with the intent of breaking into the Brookings Institution where Nixon thought the missing file might be locked away in a safe.

Although it’s still not clear what happened to the Brookings burglary, Hunt’s team did conduct other operations, including a May 1972 break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate to rifle files and plant some bugs. Then, on June 17, 1972, during a second Watergate break-in, Hunt’s team got caught. [For more on this history, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Rethinking Watergate/Iran-Contra.”](#)]

The news media’s aggressive coverage of Watergate and the public’s fascination with the scandal, which forced Nixon’s resignation in 1974, revealed other shortcomings in the Republican strategy for getting and keeping power. In the wake of the Vietnam War, the American people and the press corps were no longer so easily conned.

That set the stage for the next act. Republicans and their wealthy patrons recognized the need to build a right-wing infrastructure of media, think tanks and pressure groups. Spurred on by a famous planning memo from corporate lawyer (and later Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell and the organizational skills of Nixon's former Treasury Secretary Bill Simon, this infrastructure began to take shape in the mid-to-late 1970s.

The Right's massive investment in media, think tanks and pressure groups also coincided with the dismantling of similar institutions created by the Left during the American civil rights era and the Vietnam anti-war movement. Not only did left-of-center media outlets like Ramparts and Dispatch News disappear but others, like The New Republic and alternative weeklies, were bought up by neocons and corporations.

Well-funded, right-wing think tanks, like Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute, were soon generating a steady flow of policy papers while right-wing "media watchdogs" targeted mainstream journalists who critiqued right-wing claims and thus got tagged as "liberal" or "anti-American."

The Reagan Arrival

In 1980, the Republicans again benefitted from a high-profile foreign policy failure by a Democratic president, this time Jimmy Carter's inability to gain the release of 52 American hostages in Iran, with Republicans once more maneuvering behind the scenes to disrupt the President's negotiations. [See Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative* for the latest evidence.]

Ronald Reagan rode the wave of national humiliation to a big victory and got an extra boost when the Iranians waited until his inauguration to let the hostages go. Inside the mainstream news media like The Associated Press where I was working senior executives celebrated what they perceived to be Reagan restoring American honor.

Once in office, Reagan's team also got to work expanding the right-wing infrastructure. Hard-line CIA Director William J. Casey transferred one of his senior disinformationists, Walter Raymond Jr., to the National Security Council to head up a special inter-agency propaganda initiative aimed at another potential threat to Republican dominance, a skeptical American public.

A key lesson from the Vietnam War was that widespread public opposition to an expeditionary conflict could make the effort untenable. So, the Reagan administration invested vast amounts of energy into what was called "perception management," controlling how the American people perceived foreign interventions in Central America and elsewhere.

From documents that are now declassified, it is clear that the main goal of Raymond's "perception management" was not to inform the American people about the real situation but to push their "hot buttons" and manipulate their fears and emotions. [For details, see Robert Parry's *Lost History*.]

The right-wing infrastructure, buttressed by sophisticated government propaganda, proved strikingly effective, particularly since much of the mainstream news media was in a full-scale retreat by the 1980s.

So, despite the blemish of another scandal the Iran-Contra Affair the 12-year expanse of rule by Ronald Reagan and then George H.W. Bush firmly established the pattern of GOP dominance inside Official Washington. Presidents Reagan and Bush also filled the federal courts with Republican judges who could provide another layer of protection for any new abuses of power.

Bashing Walsh

Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh himself a lifelong Republican encountered that reality as he tried to get to the bottom of the secret arms deals with Iran and the money flowing to Nicaragua's Contra rebels. He faced not only a relentless White House cover-up and a pounding from the powerful right-wing media but he was undercut by Republican judges on the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington.

In his memoir of the Iran-Contra investigation entitled *Firewall*, Walsh described the GOP's court majority as "a powerful band of Republican appointees [who] waited like the strategic reserves of an embattled army, a force cloaked in the black robes of those dedicated to defining and preserving the rule of law."

Because of his dogged persistence, Walsh also became the subject of ridicule from key columnists and editorial writers at The Washington Post and The New York Times and from television pundits like David Brinkley and Chris Matthews. Walsh was mocked as a modern-day Captain Ahab obsessed by the White Whale of Iran-Contra.

In a Washington Post magazine article, writer Marjorie Williams summed up the Establishment's indictment of Walsh. She wrote: "In the utilitarian political universe of Washington, consistency like Walsh's is distinctly suspect. It began to seem rigid of him to care so much. So un-Washington. Hence the gathering critique of his efforts as vindictive, extreme. Ideological. The truth is that when Walsh finally goes home, he will leave a perceived loser."

In 1992, I asked Spencer Oliver, who was then chief counsel to the House Foreign Affairs Committee and whose phone had been one of those bugged by the Watergate

burglars in 1972, what he thought about the long-term impact of the Watergate scandal.

Speaking as the Iran-Contra inquiry was failing and the Republican cover-up was succeeding, Oliver said, "What they learned from Watergate was not 'don't do it,' but 'cover it up more effectively.' They have learned that they have to frustrate congressional oversight and press scrutiny in a way that will avoid another major scandal.

"It's all politics to them the pursuit and maintenance of power. It is the ultimate example of the ends justify the means and the means are so abhorrent to democracy that they cannot let the people know."

Though Oliver's assessment was made more than two decades ago, it remains an important insight into Republican thinking ever since. Even during interludes of Democratic presidencies, the Republicans stay on the attack, doing whatever it takes to undermine the interlopers interfering with GOP dominance.

For eight years, President Bill Clinton was the target of endless Republican investigations, which ultimately led to an impeachment vote in the House for his extramarital affair with Monica Lewinsky and a humiliating trial in the Senate where the Republicans lacked the super-majority to convict him.

Stealing the White House

Then, in Election 2000, Vice President Al Gore won the national popular vote and would have carried the key state of Florida if all ballots legal under Florida law had been counted. But five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court stopped the recount and then concocted an absurd legal argument to award the presidency to George W. Bush.

Not only did the right-wing media led by Fox News cheer on this undemocratic result but the mainstream media fell dutifully in line. When a later media recount of Florida's disputed ballots determined that Gore was the rightful winner, senior news executives at the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN and elsewhere hid their own findings so as not to undercut Bush's "legitimacy."

Despite his lack of a mandate, President Bush rode roughshod over the Democrats, enacting legislation that squandered Clinton's surplus by providing tax cuts mostly for the rich and then borrowing to wage war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Bush's gross mismanagement of the government and the economy left the nation in a financial disaster when Barack Obama was elected in November 2008.

With the economy in freefall and with two unresolved wars, Obama and other Democrats hoped that the severity of the nation's crisis would compel

congressional Republicans to cooperate on jobs bills, economic stimulus and other national needs.

However, the GOP never missed a beat, fighting everything that Obama proposed, while Fox and the right-wing media peddled racist conspiracy theories about his “Kenyan birth.” Armed right-wing protesters showed up at anti-Obama rallies and Tea Party extremists disrupted congressional “town hall” meetings.

When the angry Republicans won the House and swept a number of statehouses in 2010, they promptly got busy gerrymandering congressional districts to ensure future GOP victories and devaluing the votes of racial and ethnic minorities. Then, in 2012, came a host of schemes to discourage minorities from voting.

The Republican controlling the U.S. Supreme Court chipped in, too, by striking down federal laws limiting how much corporations and other big-money sources can pour into campaigns. GOP politicians, such as Karl Rove, followed up by organizing groups to funnel that money into an array of negative campaign ads against Democrats.

A primary goal was to defeat Obama in 2012 when it was assumed a Republican president would reclaim control of the U.S. government and finally implement the dream of dismantling Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. However, Obama and the Democrats proved surprisingly resilient, shocking the Republicans on election night by keeping the White House and Senate.

Still, with the gerrymandered congressional districts, the Republicans managed to retain a House majority despite losing the national popular vote by more than a million ballots. And, the election reversals did nothing to change the GOP’s DNA, which still carries the anti-democratic genes of Richard Nixon and his henchmen.

So, Obama’s current charm offensive like his outreach to Republican “moderates” in 2009 is likely to achieve little. That is because Republicans do not believe that elections have consequences, unless they win, of course.

Thus, this week’s retrograde House Republican budget should have come as no surprise, nor should the continued Senate filibustering of Obama’s judicial appointments, nor should resistance to his proposals for immigration reform and gun safety laws. For the modern Republican Party, power, not democracy, is what matters.

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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-Contra's 'Lost Chapter'

From the Archive: In 1987, amid the Iran-Contra inquiry, investigators found that the scandal fit within a larger Republican scheme for manipulating American public opinion through CIA-style disinformation. But GOP senators blocked inclusion of the chapter in the final report, Robert Parry wrote in 2008.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on June 30, 2008)

As historians ponder George W. Bush's disastrous presidency, they may wonder how Republicans perfected a propaganda system that could fool tens of millions of Americans, intimidate Democrats, and transform the vaunted Washington press corps from watchdogs to lapdogs.

To understand this extraordinary development, historians might want to look back at the 1980s and examine the Iran-Contra scandal's "lost chapter," a narrative describing how Ronald Reagan's administration brought CIA tactics to bear domestically to reshape the way Americans perceived the world.

That chapter [which we are publishing here for the first time](#) was "lost" because Republicans on the congressional Iran-Contra investigation waged a rear-guard fight that traded elimination of the chapter's key findings for the votes of three moderate GOP senators, giving the final report a patina of bipartisanship.

Under that compromise, a few segments of the draft chapter were inserted in the final report's Executive Summary and in another section on White House private fundraising, but the chapter's conclusions and its detailed account of how the "perception management" operation worked ended up on the editing room floor.

The American people thus were spared the chapter's troubling finding: that the Reagan administration had built a domestic covert propaganda apparatus managed by a CIA propaganda and disinformation specialist working out of the National Security Council.

"One of the CIA's most senior covert action operators was sent to the NSC in 1983 by CIA Director [William] Casey where he participated in the creation of an

inter-agency public diplomacy mechanism that included the use of seasoned intelligence specialists,” the chapter’s conclusion stated.

“This public/private network set out to accomplish what a covert CIA operation in a foreign country might attempt to sway the media, the Congress, and American public opinion in the direction of the Reagan administration’s policies.”

However, with the chapter’s key findings deleted, the right-wing domestic propaganda operation not only survived the Iran-Contra fallout but thrived.

So did some of the administration’s collaborators, such as South Korean theocrat Sun Myung Moon and Australian press mogul Rupert Murdoch, two far-right media barons who poured billions of dollars into pro-Republican news outlets that continue to influence Washington’s political debates to this day.

Before every presidential election, Moon’s Washington Times plants derogatory and often false stories about Democratic contenders, discrediting them and damaging their chances of winning the White House.

For instance, in 1988, the Times published a bogus account suggesting that the Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis had undergone psychiatric treatment. In 2000, Moon’s newspaper pushed the theme that Al Gore suffered from clinical delusions. [For details, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

As for Murdoch, his giant News Corp. expanded into American cable TV with the founding of Fox News in 1996. Since then, the right-wing network has proved highly effective in promoting attack lines against Democrats or anyone else who challenges the Republican power structure.

As President George W. Bush herded the nation toward war with Iraq in 2002-03, Fox News acted like his sheep dogs making sure public opinion didn’t stray too far off. The “Fox effect” was so powerful that it convinced other networks to load up with pro-war military analysts and to silence voices that questioned the invasion. [See *Neck Deep*.]

Seeds of Propaganda

The seeds of this private/public collaboration can be found in the 84-page draft Iran-Contra chapter, entitled “Launching the Private Network.” [There appear to have been several versions of this “lost chapter.” This one I found in congressional files.]

The chapter traces the origins of the propaganda network to President Reagan’s “National Security Decision Directive 77” in January 1983 as his administration sought to promote its foreign policy, especially its desire to oust Nicaragua’s

leftist Sandinista government.

In a Jan. 13, 1983, memo, then-National Security Advisor William Clark foresaw the need for non-governmental money to advance this cause. "We will develop a scenario for obtaining private funding," Clark wrote.

As administration officials began reaching out to wealthy supporters, lines against domestic propaganda soon were crossed as the operation took aim at not only at foreign audiences but at U.S. public opinion, the press and congressional Democrats who opposed funding Nicaraguan rebels, known as Contras.

At the time, the Contras were earning a gruesome reputation as human rights violators and terrorists. To change this negative perception of the Contras, the Reagan administration created a full-blown, clandestine propaganda operation.

"An elaborate system of inter-agency committees was eventually formed and charged with the task of working closely with private groups and individuals involved in fundraising, lobbying campaigns and propagandistic activities aimed at influencing public opinion and governmental action," the draft chapter said.

Heading this operation was a veteran CIA officer named Walter Raymond Jr., who was recruited by another CIA officer, Donald Gregg, before Gregg shifted from his job as chief of the NSC's Intelligence Directorate to become national security adviser to then-Vice President George H.W. Bush.

[The draft chapter doesn't use Raymond's name in its opening pages, apparently because some of the information came from classified depositions. However, Raymond's name is used later in the chapter and the earlier citations match Raymond's role.]

According to the draft report, the CIA officer recruited for the NSC job had served as Director of the Covert Action Staff at the CIA from 1978 to 1982 and was a "specialist in propaganda and disinformation."

"The CIA official [Raymond] discussed the transfer with [CIA Director William] Casey and NSC Advisor William Clark that he be assigned to the NSC as Gregg's successor [in June 1982] and received approval for his involvement in setting up the public diplomacy program along with his intelligence responsibilities," the chapter said.

"In the early part of 1983, documents obtained by the Select [Iran-Contra] Committees indicate that the Director of the Intelligence Staff of the NSC [Raymond] successfully recommended the establishment of an inter-governmental network to promote and manage a public diplomacy plan designed to create support for Reagan Administration policies at home and abroad."

Raymond “helped to set up an elaborate system of inter-agency committees,” the draft chapter said, adding: “In the Spring of 1983, the network began to turn its attention toward beefing up the Administration’s capacity to promote American support for the Democratic Resistance in Nicaragua [the Contras] and the fledgling democracy in El Salvador.

“This effort resulted in the creation of the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean in the Department of State (S/LPD), headed by Otto Reich,” a right-wing Cuban exile from Miami.

Though Secretary of State George Shultz wanted the office under his control, President Reagan insisted that Reich “report directly to the NSC,” where Raymond oversaw the operations as a special assistant to the President and the NSC’s director of international communications, the chapter said.

“At least for several months after he assumed this position, Raymond also worked on intelligence matters at the NSC, including drafting a Presidential Finding for Covert Action in Nicaragua in mid-September” 1983, the chapter said.

In other words, although Raymond was shifted to the NSC staff in part to evade prohibitions on the CIA influencing U.S. public opinion, his intelligence and propaganda duties overlapped for a time as he was retiring from the spy agency.

Key Player

Despite Raymond’s formal separation from the CIA, he acted toward the U.S. public much like a CIA officer would in directing a propaganda operation in a hostile foreign country. He was the go-to guy to keep the operation on track.

“Reich relied heavily on Raymond to secure personnel transfers from other government agencies to beef up the limited resources made available to S/LPD by the Department of State,” the chapter said.

“Personnel made available to the new office included intelligence specialists from the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Army. On one occasion, five intelligence experts from the Army’s 4th Psychological Operations Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, were assigned to work with Reich’s fast-growing operation.

“White House documents also indicate that CIA Director Casey had more than a passing interest in the Central American public diplomacy campaign.”

The chapter cited an Aug. 9, 1983, memo written by Raymond describing Casey’s participation in a meeting with public relations specialists to brainstorm how “to sell a ‘new product’ Central America by generating interest across-the-spectrum.”

In an Aug. 29, 1983, memo, Raymond recounted a call from Casey pushing his P.R. ideas. Alarmed at a CIA director participating so brazenly in domestic propaganda, Raymond wrote that "I philosophized a bit with Bill Casey (in an effort to get him out of the loop)" but with little success.

The chapter added: "Casey's involvement in the public diplomacy effort apparently continued throughout the period under investigation by the Committees," including a 1985 role in pressuring Congress to renew Contra aid and a 1986 hand in further shielding S/LPD from the oversight of Secretary Shultz.

A Raymond-authored memo to Casey in August 1986 described the shift of S/LPD then run by neoconservative theorist Robert Kagan who had replaced Reich to the control of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, which was headed by Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, another prominent neoconservative.

Another important figure in the pro-Contra propaganda was NSC staffer Oliver North, who spent a great deal of his time on the Nicaraguan public diplomacy operation even though he is better known for arranging secret arms shipments to the Contras and to Iran's radical Islamic government, leading to the Iran-Contra scandal.

The draft chapter cited a March 10, 1985, memo from North describing his assistance to CIA Director Casey in timing disclosures of pro-Contra news "aimed at securing Congressional approval for renewed support to the Nicaraguan Resistance Forces."

North's Operatives

The Iran-Contra "lost" chapter depicts a sometimes Byzantine network of contract and private operatives who handled details of the domestic propaganda while concealing the hand of the White House and the CIA.

"Richard R. Miller, former head of public affairs at AID, and Francis D. Gomez, former public affairs specialist at the State Department and USIA, were hired by S/LPD through sole-source, no-bid contracts to carry out a variety of activities on behalf of the Reagan administration policies in Central America," the chapter said.

"Supported by the State Department and White House, Miller and Gomez became the outside managers of [North operative] Spitz Channel's fundraising and lobbying activities.

"They also served as the managers of Central American political figures, defectors, Nicaraguan opposition leaders and Sandinista atrocity victims who

were made available to the press, the Congress and private groups, to tell the story of the Contra cause.”

Miller and Gomez facilitated transfers of money to Swiss and offshore banks at North’s direction, as they “became the key link between the State Department and the Reagan White House with the private groups and individuals engaged in a myriad of endeavors aimed at influencing the Congress, the media and public opinion,” the chapter said.

In its conclusion, the draft chapter read: “The State Department was used to run a prohibited, domestic, covert propaganda operation. Established despite resistance from the Secretary of State, and reporting directly to the NSC, the [S/LPD] attempted to mask many of its activities from the Congress and the American people.”

However, the American people never got to read a detailed explanation of this finding nor see the evidence. In October 1987, as the congressional Iran-Contra committees wrote their final report, Republicans protested the inclusion of this explosive information.

Though the Democrats held the majority, the GOP had leverage because Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, the House chairman, wanted some bipartisanship in the final report, especially since senior Republicans, including Rep. Dick Cheney, R-Wyoming, were preparing a strongly worded minority report.

Hamilton and the Democrats hoped that three moderate Republicans William Cohen of Maine, Warren Rudman of New Hampshire and Paul Trible of Virginia would break ranks and sign the majority report. However, the Republicans objected to the draft chapter about Ronald Reagan’s covert propaganda campaign.

As part of a compromise, some elements of the draft chapter were included in the Executive Summary but without much detail and shorn of the tough conclusions. Nevertheless, Cohen protested even that.

“I question the inordinate attention devoted in the Executive Summary to the Office of Public Diplomacy and its activities in support of the Administration’s policies,” Cohen wrote in his additional views. “The prominence given to it in the Executive Summary is far more generous than just.”

Long-Term Consequences

However, the failure of the Iran-Contra report to fully explain the danger of CIA-style propaganda intruding into the U.S. political process would have profound future consequences. Indeed, the evidence suggests that today’s powerful right-wing media gained momentum as part of the Casey-Raymond

operations of the early 1980s.

According to one Raymond-authored memo dated Aug. 9, 1983, then-U.S. Information Agency director Charles Wick "via Murdoch [sic] may be able to draw down added funds" to support pro-Reagan initiatives.

Raymond's reference to Rupert Murdoch possibly drawing down "added funds" suggests that the right-wing media mogul was already part of the covert propaganda operation. In line with its clandestine nature, Raymond also suggested routing the "funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center."

Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, publisher of the Washington Times, also showed up in the Iran-Contra operations, using his newspaper to raise Contra funds and assigning his CAUSA political group to organize support for the Contras.

In the two decades since the Iran-Contra scandal, both Murdoch and Moon have continued to pour billions of dollars into media outlets that have influenced the course of U.S. history, often through the planting of propaganda and disinformation much like a CIA covert action might do in a hostile foreign country.

Further, to soften up the Washington press corps, Reich's S/LPD targeted U.S. journalists who reported information that undermined the pro-Contra propaganda. Reich sent his teams out to lobby news executives to remove or punish out-of-step reporters with a disturbing degree of success. [For more, see Parry's *Lost History*.]

Some U.S. officials implicated in the Iran-Contra propaganda operations are still around, bringing the lessons of the 1980s into the new century. For instance, Elliott Abrams. Though convicted of misleading Congress in the Iran-Contra Affair and later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush Abrams became deputy adviser to George W. Bush's NSC, where he directed U.S.-Middle East policy.

Robert Kagan remains another prominent neocon theorist in Washington, writing op-eds for the Washington Post. Oliver North was given a news show on Fox. Otto Reich advised Republican presidential candidate John McCain on Latin American affairs. Lee Hamilton was a senior national security adviser to Democratic candidate Barack Obama.

Enduring Skills

Beyond these individuals, the manipulative techniques that were refined in the

1980s especially the skill of exaggerating foreign threats have proved durable, bringing large segments of the American population into line behind the Iraq War in 2002-03.

Only now with thousands of U.S. soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead are many of these Americans realizing that were manipulated by clever propaganda, that their perceptions had been managed.

For instance, the New York Times pried loose some 8,000 pages of Pentagon documents revealing how the Bush administration had manipulated the public debate on the Iraq War by planting friendly retired military officers on TV news shows.

Retired Green Beret Robert S. Bevelacqua, a former analyst on Murdoch's Fox News, said the Pentagon treated the retired military officers as puppets: "It was them saying, 'we need to stick our hands up your back and move your mouth for you.'" [NYT, April 20, 2008, or see Consortiumnews.com's "[US News Media's Latest Disgrace.](#)"]

Bush's former White House press secretary Scott McClellan described similar use of propaganda tactics to justify the Iraq War in his book, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception*.

From his insider vantage point, McClellan cited the White House's "carefully orchestrated campaign to shape and manipulate sources of public approval" and he called the Washington press corps "complicit enablers."

None of this would have been so surprising indeed Americans might have been forewarned and forearmed if Lee Hamilton and other Democrats on the Iran-Contra committees had held firm and published the scandal's "lost chapter" two decades ago.

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