

Gen. Hayden's Glass House

Exclusive: Official Washington's national security/mainstream media incest was on scandalous display when ex-NSA chief Michael Hayden posed as a CNN analyst to denounce Edward Snowden for exposing surveillance excesses that Hayden had a hand in creating, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Former National Security Agency Director Michael Hayden should not throw any more stones, lest his own glass house be shattered. His barrage Friday against truth-teller Edward Snowden and London Guardian journalist Glenn Greenwald invited a return rain of boulders for Hayden committing the same violations of constitutional protections that he is now excusing.

Writing as "CNN Terrorism Analyst," Hayden read from the unctuous script previously used by "Meet the Press" host David Gregory on June 23 when he questioned Greenwald's status as a journalist. Hayden claimed Greenwald deserves "the Justice Department's characterization of a co-conspirator."

But the principal target of Hayden's ire was Snowden. After lumping him together with despicable characters like CIA's Aldrich Ames, Robert Hanssen of the FBI, and others who spied for the U.S.S.R. and then disparaging "leakers" like Bradley Manning Hayden wrote, "Snowden is in a class by himself."

But it is Michael Hayden who is in a class by himself. He was the first NSA director to betray the country's trust by ordering wholesale violation of what was once the First Commandment at NSA: "Thou Shalt Not Eavesdrop on Americans Without a Court Warrant." Not to mention playing fast and loose with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 and the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution.

While Hayden has implicitly offered a second-grader kind of excuse, that President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney "made me do it," that does not let Hayden off the hook.

I have found it helpful lately to read the one-sentence Fourth Amendment during TV and radio interviews in order to provide necessary context and a backdrop against which viewers/listeners can gauge how the recent revelations about NSA operations comport, or do not, with the strictures in the amendment. Thankfully, the language is pretty straightforward and specific:

"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and

no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

Peer Review

Former NSA directors are not normally given to criticizing the performance of their successors. We know, however, about the passionate disapproval with which two of Hayden’s predecessors reacted to the revelations in the Dec. 16, 2005 *New York Times* article, “Bush Lets U.S. Spy on Callers Without Courts,” by journalists James Risen and Eric Lichtblau.

Risen had ferreted out explosive information on eavesdropping (and other highly questionable operations) several months before the 2004 presidential election, disclosures that would have given American voters some important information regarding whether Bush deserved reelection or not.

But the *Times*, in its wisdom, acquiesced to the Bush administration’s demands that the story be spiked not because the article was inaccurate, but precisely because it was so accurate, and embarrassing. The White House gave the *Times* the familiar warning that disclosure would “damage national security.”

But as 2005 drew to an end, the newspaper could wait no longer, since Risen’s book, *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*, was already in galley and about to be published. The book contained, literally, chapter and verse on the illegal activity authorized by NSA Director Michael Hayden at the behest of Bush and Cheney. (And given the way court decisions are going these days, it is seeming more and more likely that James Risen is headed for jail if he insists on the First Amendment rights of a journalist and continues to refuse to divulge his sources.)

When the *Times* finally published the story in December 2005, the Bush administration scrambled to defend the warrantless eavesdropping, a demonstrably gross violation of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) expressly forbidding eavesdropping on Americans without a court warrant. The White House immediately asked Hayden, then Deputy Director of National Intelligence, to play point man with the media, helping hapless Attorney General Alberto Gonzales defend the indefensible.

Hayden’s perfidy was too much for Gen. Bill Odom, who had been NSA Director from 1985 to 1988. Odom was seething as he prepared to be interviewed on Jan. 4, 2006, by George Kenney, a former Foreign Service officer and now producer of “Electronic Politics.” Odom blurted out, “Hayden should have been court martialed.” And President Bush “should be impeached,” added the general with

equal fury.

Odom ruled out discussing, during the interview itself, the warrantless eavesdropping revealed by the *New York Times* three weeks earlier. In a memorandum about the conversation, Kenney opined that Odom appeared so angry that he realized that if he started discussing the still-classified issue, he would not be able to control himself.

Why was Gen. Odom so angry? Because he, like all uniformed officers (as well as many civilian officials), took an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; because he took that oath seriously; and because he had done his damndest to ensure that all NSA employees strictly observed the prohibition against eavesdropping on Americans without a warrant.

Also deeply disappointed was former NSA Director Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, who led NSA from 1977 to 1981 and actually played a key role in helping shape the FISA law of 1978. (Before he retired, Inman had achieved virtual sainthood in Official Washington as one of the country's most respected intelligence managers, although he was known for looking the other way or as he put it, "pulling up his socks" when the powers-that-be were spinning the facts or exceeding their legal powers.)

Hayden's Record

From the Bush/Cheney White House perspective, Hayden had performed quite well working with the supine mainstream media to defend the Bush/Cheney illegal eavesdropping programs. For services performed, Hayden was nominated on May 8, 2006, reportedly at Cheney's urging, to replace CIA Director Porter Goss, who had retired abruptly on May 5 after just seven controversial months as director.

So the nomination of Hayden to lead the CIA was very much on the minds of Inman, Risen and others who gathered for a public discussion at the New York Public Library that same afternoon, May 8, 2006. Participants were brought up short when Inman took strong issue with Hayden's flouting of FISA:

"There clearly was a line in the FISA statutes which says you couldn't do this," said Inman, who went on to call specific attention to an "extra sentence put in the bill that said, 'You can't do anything that is not authorized by this bill.'"

Inman spoke proudly of the earlier ethos at NSA, where "it was deeply ingrained that you operate within the law and you get the law changed if you need to." Risen quipped about how easy it would have been to amend the FISA statute after the 9/11 attacks when the American people were demanding revenge: "In October

2001, you could have set up guillotines on the public streets of America.”

Attorney General Gonzales, however, knew that there were still institutional obstacles to the NSA figuratively decapitating the Fourth Amendment. At a press conference on Dec. 19, 2005, three days after the Risen/Lichtblau disclosures in the *New York Times*, Gonzales was asked why the administration did not seek new legislation to enable it to conduct the eavesdropping program legally. He responded:

“We have had discussions with Congress in the past certain members of Congress as to whether or not FISA could be amended to allow us to adequately deal with this kind of threat, and we were advised that that would be difficult, if not impossible.”

This was not the only hint at the time that the surveillance program was so huge in scope and so intrusive that even a servile Congress, typically reluctant to turn down any project labeled “anti-terrorist,” would not have blessed it. Really, could even a doormat Congress be expected to approve “Collect Everything?”

Inman’s Short-Lived Criticism

By happenstance, I found myself with a front-row seat watching honor among thieves play out, i. e., how the Washington Establishment generals and admirals cover for one other. Inman’s remarks at the New York Public Library had been written up by Steve Clemons in his blog, The Washington Note.

Worse still for Hayden, Democracynow’s Amy Goodman showed video clips of Inman’s undisguised criticism of Gen. Hayden on the morning of May 17, less than a week before the Senate Intelligence Committee took up Hayden’s nomination to be CIA director. Something needed to be done ... and quickly.

Specifically, Inman needed to be called to atone for his unspeakable sin of candor the more so since he enjoyed quasi-sainthood on both sides of the aisle in Congress. So there I sat on May 17 in the anteroom of the CNN/New York studio of Lou Dobbs, who wanted to talk to me about my mini-debate two weeks earlier with then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Iraq.

Into the waiting room rushed a breathless Bobby Ray Inman. I am then told that he has just been given part of my time, since he needed to discuss the nomination of Michael Hayden to head the CIA. I had read Steve Clemons’s blog and was well aware of Inman’s remarks on May 8. As he rushed to don a borrowed tie, I had just enough time to give him an atta-boy for his honesty at the library and to express the hope he would stay on message with Lou Dobbs. Naive me!

Watching the monitor I saw Inman give his highest recommendation for Gen. Hayden as supremely qualified to head the CIA. That, I thought to myself, is how the system works. Hayden's nomination sailed through the Senate Intelligence Committee on May 23 by a vote of 12 to 3 and the full Senate on May 26 by 78 to 15.

A whiff of conscience showed through during Hayden's nomination hearing to become CIA Director, though, when he flubbed the answer to what was supposed to be a soft, fat pitch from Bush administration loyalist, Sen. Kit Bond, R-Missouri, then vice-chair of the Senate intelligence overlook committee:

"Did you believe that your primary responsibility as director of NSA was to execute a program that your NSA lawyers, the Justice Department lawyers, and White House officials all told you was legal, and that you were ordered to carry it out by the President of the United States?"

Instead of the simple "Yes" that had been scripted, Hayden paused and spoke rather poignantly, and revealingly: "I had to make this personal decision in early October 2001, and it was a personal decision ... I could not not do this."

Why should it have been such an enormous personal decision whether or not to obey a White House order? No one asked Hayden, but it requires no particular acuity to figure it out.

This is a military officer who, like the rest of us, swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; a military man well aware that one must not obey an unlawful order; and an NSA director totally familiar with the FISA restrictions. That, it seems clear, is why Hayden found it a difficult personal decision.

Knowing the Law

No American, save perhaps Admiral Inman and Gen. Odom, knew the FISA law better than Hayden. Nonetheless, in his testimony, Hayden conceded that he did not even require a written legal opinion from NSA lawyers as to whether the new, post-9/11 comprehensive surveillance program to be implemented without court warrants, without "probable cause," and without adequate consultation in Congress could pass the smell test.

Hayden said he sought an oral opinion from then-NSA general counsel Robert L. Deitz, whom Hayden later brought over to CIA as a "trusted aide" to CIA Director Hayden! (In the fall of 2007, Hayden launched Deitz on an investigation of the CIA's own statutory Inspector General who had made the mistake of being too diligent in investigating abuses like torture).

Interestingly, Hayden did not pass the smell test for Sen. Barack Obama, D-Illinois, who on May 25 took a principled stand against his nomination and voted against it the following day. In his brief but typically eloquent one-minute speech on the Senate floor, Sen. Obama was harshly critical of both Hayden and President George W. Bush. Obama insisted that “President Bush is not above the law; no president is above the law.” His words did not ring as hollow then as they do now in retrospect.

To his credit, I suppose, President-elect Obama did get rid of Hayden for cause, as I tried to explain in “What’s CIA Director Hayden Hidin’” on Jan. 15, 2009. I ended that article with the following word of “good riddance.” (It was hardly prophetic rather a very safe bet):

“The sooner Hayden is gone (likely to join the Fawning Corporate Media channels as an expert commentator, and to warm some seats on defense-industry corporate boards) the better. His credentials would appear good for that kind of work.”

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27 years as a CIA analyst, he worked very closely with conscientious colleagues at NSA who, if they came upon the name of an American in an intercepted message, would razor it out of the paper before releasing it, that being the ethos at NSA then.

Answering Helen Thomas on Why

From the Archive: Often annoying her press colleagues, the late Helen Thomas was one of the few Washington journalists who would shatter the predictable frame for discussing tough issues. When she heard lazy rationalizations, Thomas would press the policymaker on why, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern wrote in 2010.

By Ray McGovern (Originally published on January 8, 2010)

Thank God for Helen Thomas, the only person to show any courage at the White House press briefing after President Barack Obama gave a flaccid account of the intelligence screw-up that almost downed an airliner on Christmas Day 2009.

After Obama briefly addressed L’Affaire Abdulmutallab and wrote “must do better” on the report cards of the national security schoolboys responsible for the near catastrophe, the President turned the stage over to counter-terrorism guru John Brennan and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.

It took [then] 89-year old veteran correspondent Helen Thomas to break through the vapid remarks about rechanneling “intelligence streams,” fixing “no-fly” lists, deploying “behavior detection officers,” and buying more body-imaging scanners.

Thomas recognized the John & Janet filibuster for what it was, as her catatonic press colleagues took their customary dictation and asked their predictable questions. Instead, Thomas posed an adult query that spotlighted the futility of government plans to counter terrorism with more high-tech gizmos and more intrusions on the liberties and privacy of the traveling public.

She asked why Abdulmutallab did what he did.

Thomas: “And what is the motivation? We never hear what you find out on why.”

Brennan: “Al Qaeda is an organization that is dedicated to murder and wanton slaughter of innocents They attract individuals like Mr. Abdulmutallab and use them for these types of attacks. He was motivated by a sense of religious sort of drive. Unfortunately, al Qaeda has perverted Islam, and has corrupted the concept of Islam, so that he’s (sic) able to attract these individuals. But al Qaeda has the agenda of destruction and death.”

Thomas: “And you’re saying it’s because of religion?”

Brennan: “I’m saying it’s because of an al Qaeda organization that used the banner of religion in a very perverse and corrupt way.”

Thomas: “Why?”

Brennan: “I think this is a, long issue, but al Qaeda is just determined to carry out attacks here against the homeland.”

Thomas: “But you haven’t explained why.”

Neither did President Obama, nor anyone else in the U.S. political/media hierarchy. All the American public gets is the boilerplate about how al-Qaeda evildoers are perverting a religion and exploiting impressionable young men.

There is almost no discussion about why so many people in the Muslim world object to U.S. policies so strongly that they are inclined to resist violently and even resort to suicide attacks.

Obama’s Non-Answer

I had been hoping Obama would say something intelligent about what drove Abdulmutallab to do what he did, but the President uttered a few vacuous

comments before sending in the clowns. This is what he said before he walked away from the podium:

“It is clear that al Qaeda increasingly seeks to recruit individuals without known terrorist affiliations to do their bidding. And that’s why we must communicate clearly to Muslims around the world that al Qaeda offers nothing except a bankrupt vision of misery and death while the United States stands with those who seek justice and progress. That’s the vision that is far more powerful than the hatred of these violent extremists.”

But why it is so hard for Muslims to “get” that message? Why can’t they end their preoccupation with dodging U.S. missiles in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Gaza long enough to reflect on how we are only trying to save them from terrorists while simultaneously demonstrating our commitment to “justice and progress”?

Does a smart fellow like Obama expect us to believe that all we need to do is “communicate clearly to Muslims” that it is al Qaeda, not the U.S. and its allies, that brings “misery and death”? Does any informed person not know that the unprovoked U.S.-led invasion of Iraq killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and displaced 4.5 million from their homes? How is that for “misery and death”?

Rather than a failure to communicate, U.S. officials are trying to rewrite recent history, which seems to be much easier to accomplish with the Washington press corps and large segments of the American population than with the Muslim world.

But why isn’t there a frank discussion by America’s leaders and media about the real motivation of Muslim anger toward the United States? Why was Helen Thomas the only journalist to raise the touchy but central question of motive?

Peeking Behind the Screen

We witnessed a similar phenomenon when the 9/11 Commission Report tiptoed into a cautious discussion of possible motives behind the 9/11 attacks. To their credit, the drafters of that report apparently went as far as their masters would allow, in gingerly introducing a major elephant into the room:

“America’s policy choices have consequences. Right or wrong, it is simply a fact that American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American actions in Iraq are dominant staples of popular commentary across the Arab and Muslim world.” (p. 376)

When asked later about the flabby way that last sentence ended, former Congressman Lee Hamilton, Vice-Chair of the 9/11 Commission, explained that

there had been a Donnybrook over whether that paragraph could be included at all.

The drafters also squeezed in the reason given by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as to why he “masterminded” the attacks on 9/11: “By his own account, KSM’s animus toward the United States stemmed from his violent disagreement with U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel.”

Would you believe that former Vice President Dick Cheney has also pointed to U.S. support for Israel as one of the “true sources of resentment”? This unique piece of honesty crept into his speech to the American Enterprise Institute on May 21, 2009.

Sure, he also trotted out the bromide that the terrorists hate “all the things that make us a force for good in the world.” But the Israel factor slipped into the speech, perhaps an inadvertent acknowledgement of the Israeli albatross adorning the neck of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Very few pundits and academicians are willing to allude to this reality, presumably out of fear for their future career prospects.

Former senior CIA officer Paul Pillar, now a professor at Georgetown University, is one of the few willing to refer, in his typically understated way, to “all the other things including policies and practices that affect the likelihood that people will be radicalized, and will try to act out the anger against us.” One has to fill in the blanks regarding what those “other things” are.

But no worries. Secretary Napolitano has a fix for this unmentionable conundrum. It’s called “counter-radicalization,” which she describes thusly:

“How do we identify someone before they become radicalized to the point where they’re ready to blow themselves up with others on a plane? And how do we communicate better American values and so forth around the globe?”

Better communication. That’s the ticket.

Hypocrisy and Double Talk

But Napolitano doesn’t acknowledge the underlying problem, which is that many Muslims have watched Washington’s behavior closely for many years and view U.S. declarations about peace, justice, democracy and human rights as infuriating examples of hypocrisy and double talk.

So, Washington’s sanitized discussion about motives for terrorism seems more intended for the U.S. domestic audience than the Muslim world.

After all, people in the Middle East already know how Palestinians have been mistreated for decades; how Washington has propped up Arab dictatorships; how Muslims have been locked away at Guantanamo without charges; how the U.S. military has killed civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere; how U.S. mercenaries have escaped punishment for slaughtering innocents.

The purpose of U.S. “public diplomacy” appears more designed to shield Americans from this unpleasant reality, offering instead feel-good palliatives about the beneficence of U.S. actions. Most American journalists and politicians go along with the charade out of fear that otherwise they would be accused of lacking patriotism or sympathizing with “the enemy.”

Commentators who are neither naive nor afraid are simply shut out of the Fawning Corporate Media (FCM). Salon.com’s Glen Greenwald, for example, has complained loudly about “how our blind, endless enabling of Israeli actions fuels terrorism directed at the U.S.,” and how it is taboo to point this out.

Greenwald called attention to a little-noticed Associated Press report on the possible motives of the 23-year-old Nigerian Abdulmutallab. The report quoted his Yemeni friends to the effect that he was “not overtly extremist.” But they noted that he was open about his sympathies toward the Palestinians and **his anger over Israel’s actions in Gaza.** (emphasis added)

Former CIA specialist on al Qaeda, Michael Scheuer, has been still more outspoken on what he sees as Israel’s tying down the American Gulliver in the Middle East. Speaking on C-SPAN, he complained bitterly that any debate on the issue of American support for Israel and its effects is normally squelched.

Scheuer added that the Israel Lobby had just succeeded in getting him removed from his job at the Jamestown Foundation think tank for saying that Obama was “doing what I call the Tel Aviv Two Step.”

More to the point, Scheuer asserted: “For anyone to say that our support for Israel doesn’t hurt us in the Muslim world is to just defy reality.”

Beyond loss of work, those who speak out can expect ugly accusations. The Israeli media network Arutz Sheva, which is considered the voice of the settler movement, weighed in strongly, citing Scheuer’s C-SPAN remarks and branding them “blatantly anti-Semitic.”

Media Squelching

As for media squelching, I continue to be amazed at how otherwise informed folks express total surprise when I refer them to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s statement about his motivation for attacking the United States, as cited on page 147 of

the 9/11 Commission Report:

“By his own account, KSM’s animus toward the United States stemmed not from his experience there as a student, but rather from his violent disagreement with U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel.”

And one can understand how even those following such things closely can get confused. Five years after the 9/11 Commission Report, on Aug. 30, 2009, readers of the neoconservative Washington Post were given a diametrically different view, based on what the Post called “an intelligence summary:”

“KSM’s limited and negative experience in the United States, which included a brief jail stay because of unpaid bills, almost certainly helped propel him on his path to becoming a terrorist. He stated that his contact with Americans, while minimal, confirmed his view that the United States was a debauched and racist country.”

Apparently, the Post found this revisionist version politically more convenient, in that it obscured Mohammed’s other explanation implicating “U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel.” It’s much more comforting to view KSM as a disgruntled visitor who nursed his personal grievances into justification for mass murder.

An unusually candid view of the dangers accruing from the U.S. identification with Israel’s policies appeared five years ago in an unclassified study published by the Pentagon-appointed U.S. Defense Science Board on Sept. 23, 2004. Contradicting President George W. Bush, the board stated:

“Muslims do not ‘hate our freedom,’ but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the longstanding, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Gulf States.

“Thus, when American public diplomacy talks about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypocrisy.”

Abdulmutallab’s Attack

Getting back to Abdulmutallab and his motive in trying to blow up the airliner, how was this individual without prior terrorist affiliations suddenly transformed into an international terrorist ready to die while killing innocents?

If, as John Brennan seems to suggest, al Qaeda terrorists are hard-wired for terrorism at birth for the “wanton slaughter of innocents,” how are they able to

jump-start a privileged 23-year old Nigerian, inculcate in him with the acquired characteristics of a terrorist, and persuade him to do the bidding of al Qaeda/Persian Gulf?

As indicated above, the young Nigerian seems to have had particular trouble with Israel's wanton slaughter of more than a thousand civilians in Gaza in 2008-2009, a brutal campaign that was defended in Washington as justifiable self-defense.

Moreover, it appears that Abdulmuttallab is not the only anti-American "terrorist" so motivated. When the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al Qaeda announced that they were uniting into "al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula," their combined rhetoric railed against the Israeli attack on Gaza.

And on Dec. 30, 2009, Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi, a 32-year-old Jordanian physician from a family of Palestinian origin, killed seven American CIA operatives and one Jordanian intelligence officer near Khost, Afghanistan, when he detonated a suicide bomb.

Though most U.S. media stories treated al-Balawi as a fanatical double-agent driven by irrational hatreds, other motivations could be gleaned by carefully reading articles about his personal history.

Al-Balawi's mother told Agence France-Presse that her son had never been an "extremist." Al-Balawi's widow, Defne Bayrak, made a similar statement to Newsweek. In a New York Times article, al-Balawi's brother was quoted as describing him as a "very good brother" and a "brilliant doctor."

So what led al-Balawi to take his own life in order to kill U.S. and Jordanian intelligence operatives? Al-Balawi's widow said her husband "started to change" after the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. His brother said al-Balawi "changed" during the three-week-long Israeli offensive in Gaza in 2008-2009, which killed about 1,300 Palestinians.

When al-Balawi volunteered with a medical organization to treat injured Palestinians in Gaza, he was arrested by Jordanian authorities, his brother said. It was after that arrest that the Jordanian intelligence service apparently coerced or "recruited" al-Balawi to become a spy who would penetrate al Qaeda's hierarchy and provide actionable intelligence to the CIA.

"If you catch a cat and put it in a corner, she will jump on you," the brother said in explaining why al-Balawi would turn to a suicide attack.

"My husband was anti-American; so am I," his widow said, adding that her two little girls would grow up fatherless but that she had no regrets.

Answering Helen

Are we starting to get the picture of what the United States is up against in the Muslim world? Does Helen Thomas deserve an adult answer to her question about motive? Has President Obama been able to assimilate all this?

Or is the U.S. political/media establishment incapable of confronting this reality and/or taking meaningful action to alleviate the underlying causes of the violence? Is the reported reaction of a CIA official to al-Balawi's attack the appropriate one: "Last week's attack will be avenged. Some very bad people will eventually have a very bad day."

Revenge has not always turned out very well in the past. Does anyone remember the brutal killing of four Blackwater contractors on March 31, 2004, when they took a wrong turn and ended up in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, and how U.S. forces virtually leveled that large city in retribution after George W. Bush won his second term the following November?

If you read only the Fawning Corporate Media, you would blissfully think that the killing of the four Blackwater operatives was the work of fanatical animals who got along with their neighbors what they deserved. You wouldn't know that the killings represented the second turn in that specific cycle of violence.

On March 22, 2004, Israeli forces assassinated the then-spiritual leader of Hamas in Gaza, Sheikh Yassin, a withering old man, blind and confined to a wheelchair. That murder, plus sloppy navigation by the Blackwater men, set the stage for the next set of brutalities. The Blackwater operatives were killed by a group that described itself as the "Sheikh Yassin Revenge Brigade."

Pamphlets and posters were all over the scene of the attack; one of the trucks that pulled around body parts of the mercenaries had a poster of Yassin in its window, as did store fronts all over Fallujah.

We can wish Janet Napolitano luck with her "counter-radicalization" project and President Obama with his effort to "communicate clearly to Muslims," but there will be no diminution in the endless cycles of violence unless legitimate grievances are addressed on all sides.

It might also help if the American people were finally let in on the root causes for what otherwise get dismissed as irrational actions by Muslims.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During a 27-year career at CIA, he served under nine CIA directors and in all four of CIA's main directorates, including operations. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for

Standing Up for Helen Thomas

From the Archive: Helen Thomas, a courageous trailblazer for women covering power politics, has died at the age of 92. Though recalled for her tough questioning of presidents, her career was unceremoniously ended when her media colleagues ostracized her over a clumsy remark about Israel, Robert Parry reported in 2010.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on June 8, 2010)

Long-time White House correspondent Helen Thomas was right to apologize for a stupid remark she made about Israeli Jews leaving Palestine, but another ugly part of this incident was how her “mainstream” colleagues quickly turned on this [then] 89-year-old icon.

Washington Post media writer Howard Kurtz penned [a retrospective](#) on Thomas’s apology and sudden retirement from journalism, giving Thomas’s critics a free shot at denouncing her for a supposed lack of “objectivity,” a principle that has been as absent in the modern Washington press corps as frugality and common sense on Wall Street.

The simple truth is that the media’s acceptable bias on the Middle East is almost entirely in the opposite direction. Thomas, who is of Lebanese descent, has been one of the few Washington journalists who dared criticize Israeli mistreatment of Muslims in Palestine, Lebanon and elsewhere and who views Arabs as people deserving of respect and human rights.

The dominant Washington media view, as articulated by the Washington Post’s neoconservative editorial section, has been that Israel is always right, except for some possible tactical misjudgments, and that Muslim organizations and nations that oppose Israel are “terrorists.”

In recent years, Israel’s disproportionate retaliation against people in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon has been defended as a proper response to Arab aggression. Israel’s own history of using terrorism, invading its neighbors and hiding a nuclear weapons arsenal is left outside the media frame.

The Washington press corps also has clambered eagerly onboard the bandwagon for U.S. military invasions of Muslim nations. When President George W. Bush was

justifying an unprovoked attack on Iraq in 2002-03, the New York Times and other big news outlets happily took their seats next to the neocons driving for war. After Bush's invasion toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, MSNBC host Chris Matthews ridiculed the war's critics and declared, "we're all neocons now."

Then, several months after the invasion when the promised Iraqi WMD stockpiles hadn't materialized, Bush began revising the history in front of the White House press corps by claiming that Hussein had barred United Nations inspectors from Iraq, leaving Bush no choice but to invade.

On July 14, 2003, Bush told reporters, "We gave him [Saddam Hussein] a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn't let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him from power."

Facing no direct contradiction of this lie, Bush continued repeating it again and again for the next five years. The objective truth was that Hussein had let the inspectors examine any site of their choosing for months, and they were forced out not by Hussein but by Bush in the days before he launched his "shock-and-awe" invasion. In those days, however, it was scary to challenge Bush.

Only One Helen Thomas

As the Iraq War claimed the lives of thousands of U.S. soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, the key problem with the Washington press corps wasn't that it had one Helen Thomas, it was that it only had one Helen Thomas, someone willing to ask the impertinent but important question that pierced the conventional wisdom which dangerously restricts the capital's policy debates.

Thomas also had the integrity to refuse to allow her name and reputation to be used by South Korean theocrat (and right-wing funder) Sun Myung Moon when he took over United Press International in 2000. Then the best-known journalist at UPI, she resigned as an act of principle.

Though Moon was a notorious propagandist who had founded the Washington Times in 1982 as a vehicle for supporting some American politicians (such as Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush) and for tearing down others (such as John Kerry, Bill Clinton and Al Gore), much of the "objective" Washington press corps tolerated and even promoted Moon's curious newspaper.

In the mid-1980s, after Moon's newspaper signed up for the Associated Press wire service, AP executives told AP staffers, including me, that we were no longer allowed to mention Moon's connection to the newspaper when we cited the Washington Times' reporting in AP copy. That policy change meant that readers of AP stories around the world wouldn't be alerted to the propaganda element of Moon's operation.

Other respected Washington news figures, such as C-SPAN's Brian Lamb, actively promoted Moon's newspaper by hoisting up its articles before viewers, many of whom had no idea that the Times' owner was a religious cult leader with mysterious ties to foreign intelligence services and to international crime syndicates. [For details, see Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

So, while Moon's newspaper was influencing the U.S. political debate with propagandistic articles and while Moon was spreading around money for political and journalism conferences Helen Thomas was one of the few prominent figures in the Washington press corps to object. (After resigning from UPI, she took a job as a columnist for the Hearst newspapers.)

Nevertheless, Helen Thomas was pilloried as the crazy, unprofessional one, as Kurtz made clear in his article.

"She asked questions no hard-news reporter would ask, that carried an agenda and reflected her point of view and there were some reporters who felt that was inappropriate," CBS correspondent Mark Knoller was quoted as saying. "Sometimes her questions were embarrassing to others."

'Crazy Stuff'

"She's always said crazy stuff," added National Review Online columnist Jonah Goldberg, whose "journalism" career was launched as a defender of his mother, Lucianne Goldberg, after she advised disgruntled federal employee Linda Tripp to tape her conversations with President Bill Clinton's girlfriend Monica Lewinsky and to save the semen-stained blue dress.

"I did my bit in the trenches of Clinton's trousers," Goldberg once wrote. Goldberg is now a frequent guest on high-profile TV news shows, such as ABC's "Good Morning America," "Nightline," MSNBC's "Hardball with Chris Matthews," CNN's "Larry King Live," and, of course, many Fox News shows.

As examples of Helen Thomas's "crazy stuff," Kurtz cited some of her questions as if the very words proved her unfitness to work as a national journalist. For instance, he wrote:

"In 2002, Thomas asked [White House press secretary Ari] Fleischer: 'Does the president think that the Palestinians have a right to resist 35 years of brutal military occupation and suppression?'" Apparently, no further comment was needed for Washington Post readers to understand how outlandish such a question was.

Kurtz continued: "Four years later, Thomas told Fleischer's successor, Tony Snow, that the United States 'could have stopped the bombardment of Lebanon' by Israel, but instead had 'gone for collective punishment against all of Lebanon

and Palestine.’ Snow tartly thanked her for ‘the Hezbollah view.’”

Kurtz praised some of Thomas’s colleagues who alerted the world to the dangers of Helen Thomas earlier. He wrote:

“A handful of journalists questioned her role over the years. In a 2006 New Republic piece, Jonathan Chait accused Thomas of ‘unhinged rants,’ noting that she had asked such questions as: ‘Why are we killing people in Iraq? Men, women, and children are being killed there It’s outrageous.’”

Again, Kurtz appeared to believe that the absurdity of Thomas’s statement was self-evident. [Kurtz, who was then also host of CNN’s media-criticism show “Reliable Sources,” has since left the Post and CNN. He currently hosts the Fox News Channel’s “Fox News Watch.”]

Pinning Obama

Even in the final months of her career, Thomas continued her role as a burr under the saddle of Official Washington. At Barack Obama’s first press conference as president, Thomas tried to pierce one of the core hypocrisies of Washington the double standard regarding Israel’s rogue nuclear weapons arsenal by asking Obama if he knew of any country in the Middle East that possessed nukes. Obama stumbled in response, saying he didn’t want to “speculate.”

Her query, however, drew the predictable fury from the Right. It was assuredly one of those inconvenient questions that made many of her press colleagues roll their eyes.

The pack behavior of the Washington press corps was on display again in the fury that followed Thomas’s off-the-cuff response to a question on May 27, 2010, from a rabbi with a video-camera who asked her for “any comments on Israel?” Thomas responded by saying that Israeli Jews “should get the hell out of Palestine” and “go home” to Germany, Poland and the United States.

When the video went viral on the Internet and a firestorm ensued, Thomas abruptly quit her job as a Hearst columnist, ending a career that dated back to the Kennedy era when she was a trailblazing woman breaking into the Old Boys club of Washington journalism.

Thomas issued a statement repudiating her May 27 comments, saying they “do not reflect my heartfelt belief that peace will come to the Middle East only when all parties recognize the need for mutual respect and tolerance.”

With that Thomas departed the scene and the thankful Washington press corps was finally freed from those periodic embarrassments of having to watch presidents

squirm in reaction to Thomas's out-of-the-box questions.

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](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
