

The New Republic's Ugly Reality

Exclusive: Mainstream pundits are outraged over a Silicon Valley barbarian riding in and defacing The New Republic, a temple to all that is wonderful about deep-thinking policymaking and long-form journalism. But the truth about the Washington-based magazine is much less honorable, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

There has been much handwringing of late in Official Washington about an editorial shakeup at The New Republic and the possibility that the century-old political magazine's legacy will somehow be tarnished by its new owner. But the truth about The New Republic is that it has more blood on its hands than almost any other publication around, which is saying something.

In my four decades in national journalism that's two-fifths of The New Republic's life what I have seen from the magazine is mostly its smug advocacy for U.S. interventionism abroad and snarky putdowns of antiwar skeptics at home. Indeed, you could view The New Republic as the most productive hothouse for cultivating neoconservative dogma – and at least partly responsible for the senseless slaughter associated with that ideology.

Though The New Republic still touts its reputation as “liberal,” that label has been essentially a cover for its real agenda: pushing a hawkish foreign policy agenda that included the Reagan administration's slaughter of Central Americans in the 1980s, violent U.S. interventions in Iraq, Syria and other Muslim countries for the past two decades, and Israel's suppression of Palestinians forever.

Indeed, the magazine's long-ago-outdated status as “liberal” has long served the cause of right-wingers. The Reagan administration loved to plant flattering stories about the Nicaraguan Contras in The New Republic because its “liberal” cachet would give the propaganda more credibility. A favorite refrain from President Ronald Reagan's team was “even the liberal New Republic agrees ”

In other words, the magazine became the neocon wolf advancing the slaughter of Central Americans in the sheep's clothing of intellectual liberalism. Similarly, over the past two decades, it has dressed up bloody U.S. interventionism in the Middle East in the pretty clothes of “humanitarianism” and “democracy.”

The magazine which has given us the writings of neocons Charles Krauthammer, Fred Barnes, Steven Emerson, Robert Kagan and many more has become a case study in the special evil that can come from intellectualism when it supplies high-minded rationalizations for low-brow brutality.

In the world of the mind, where The New Republic likes to think it lives, the magazine has published countless essays that have spun excuses for mass murder, rape, torture and other real-world crimes. Put differently, the magazine afforded the polite people of Official Washington an acceptable way to compartmentalize and justify the ungodly bloodshed.

Perhaps The New Republic had a different existence in the years before I arrived on the scene. I've heard some longtime New Republic lovers wax on about its era of thoughtful progressivism. But The New Republic that I encountered from the 1970s onward was the magazine of Martin Peretz, a nasty neocon who cared little about journalism or even thoughtful analyses, but rather pushed a dishonest and cruel agenda including crude insults against Muslims.

In his later years after moving part-time to Israel, Peretz began to expose more of his personal agenda. In one [TNR blog post](#) regarding the proposed Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan which prompted post-9/11 right-wing outrage, Peretz declared: "Frankly, Muslim life is cheap, most notably to Muslims. And among those Muslims led by the Imam Rauf [the promoter of the Islamic center] there is hardly one who has raised a fuss about the routine and random bloodshed that defines their brotherhood.

"So, yes, I wonder whether I need honor these people and pretend that they are worthy of the privileges of the First Amendment which I have in my gut the sense that they will abuse." (Facing accusations of racism, Peretz later issued a half-hearted apology which reiterated that his reference to Muslim life being cheap was "a statement of fact, not opinion.")

A New York Times magazine [profile](#) of Peretz in 2011 noted that Peretz's hostility toward Muslims was nothing new. "As early as 1988, Peretz was courting danger in The New Republic with disturbing Arab stereotypes not terribly different from his 2010 remarks," wrote Stephen Rodrick.

Steven Emerson, one of Peretz's favored TNR writers, also became notorious for similar Islamophobia as well as shoddy and dishonest journalism. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Unmasking October Surprise Debunker."](#)]

Ignoring the History

Yet, very little of this real history of The New Republic can be found in the mainstream media's coverage of the recent staff revolt against plans by new owner (and Facebook co-founder) Chris Hughes to modernize the publication. Hughes's new chief executive former Yahoo official Guy Vidra vowed to rebuild the magazine as a "vertically integrated digital media company."

At the Washington Post, the New York Times and pretty much the entire MSM, there

has been much rending of garments over these plans and the ouster of some top editors but almost nothing about what some of those now ex-TNR editors actually did.

One was longtime literary editor Leon Wieseltier, who was a prominent advocate for the Iraq War and a promoter of right-wing Zionism. Another was editor Franklin Foer, another hawkish intellectual. Their departures were followed by a walkout by a dozen or so members of the editorial staff, resignations from contributing columnists, an outraged letter from former TNR writers and furious columns by ex-TNR staffers.

“The New Republic is dead; Chris Hughes killed it,” wailed Post columnist Dana Milbank, another TNR alumnus.

On Monday, the 31-year-old Hughes took to the Post’s op-ed page to offer Official Washington something like a paper bag to control all the hyperventilating. He denied that he was behaving like some spoiled Silicon Valley rich kid imposing an Internet-style culture on an old-fashioned print publication, but rather was trying to save the institution.

“I came to protect the future of the New Republic by creating a sustainable business so that our journalism, values and voice, the things that make us singular, could survive,” Hughes wrote.

But the real question is: Does The New Republic deserve to survive? Wouldn’t it be appropriate that at least one neocon institution faced some accountability for the hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis, not to mention the other victims of reckless U.S. interventionism in the Middle East or the tens of thousands of murdered Central Americans during the Reagan years?

Though The New Republic’s apologists depict the magazine as an honorable place where “long-form journalism” thrived and “serious thinking” was nourished, the reality was actually much different. Indeed, much of the trivialization of U.S. journalism in the 1980s stemmed from the punchy opinions voiced by TNR columnists as they moonlighted as talking heads on the TV “shout shows,” like “The McLaughlin Group” and “Inside Washington.”

Many of the regulars on those media “food fights” came from The New Republic and lowered the intellectual level of Official Washington into a “thumbs up, thumbs down” reductionism where political leaders were rated on scales of one to ten. Their well-compensated behavior was the opposite of true intellectualism or for that matter true journalism.

Phony Posture

The typical posture of these media-beloved neocons was to pretend that they were bravely standing up against some "liberal" orthodoxy, courageously daring to embrace the Nicaraguan Contras or other right-wing "freedom fighters" despite the danger of taking such principled stands.

The reality was that TNR's writers were lining up behind the real power structure, standing with the Reagan administration and much of the major media while joining in the bullying of the relatively weak and vulnerable forces in Washington that went against this grain.

The phoniness of TNR's pretend bravery was demonstrated by how the neocon commentators were rewarded with plum jobs, prominent op-ed slots, regular seats on the TV shows, lucrative speaking fees, book contracts, etc. The opposite was true for journalists who challenged the Reagan administration's propaganda. They were the ones who faced real punishment.

Journalists who dared file critical stories about the U.S.-backed Salvadoran army or the CIA-trained Contra rebels found themselves reassigned or out on the street. The New York Times' Raymond Bonner was the best known example after he was pulled out of Central America while under fierce right-wing attack for his accurate reporting on human rights atrocities in El Salvador.

In a similar case, the Reagan administration's public diplomacy team browbeat National Public Radio for airing a story about a Contra massacre of farmworkers in northern Nicaragua. Sensitive to government strings on NPR's funding, NPR executives appeased the administration by getting rid of foreign editor Paul Allen who had allowed the story to air.

Within a short time, Washington journalists understood that their route to professional success required them to swallow any propaganda from Reagan's team, no matter how absurd.

That servility was on display when Reagan's White House fumed over one human rights report citing 145 sworn affidavits signed by Nicaraguans who had witnessed Contra atrocities. Many of the witnesses described Contras slitting the throats of captives and mutilating their bodies.

In stepped The New Republic and one of its many pro-Contra writers, Fred Barnes, who countered the eyewitnesses by referencing the findings of a secret U.S. investigation which had absolved the Contras of many charges, he wrote. In a harsh article entitled "The Sandinista Lobby," Barnes denounced the human rights community for hypocritically criticizing the innocent Contras and other pro-U.S. forces, while allegedly going soft on Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

But when I got hold of the investigative report in 1986, I found that it had

been written by the CIA and was based on the word of the Contras themselves. One of the CIA's key findings, supposedly debunking the slitting-throat allegations, was that the Contras said they could not have slit throats because they "are normally not equipped with either bayonets or combat knives." The CIA failed to note that photographs of the Contras from that period showed them slouching off to battle carrying a variety of machetes and other sharp objects.

The absurdity of suggesting that the Contras could not have slit the throats of captives because they weren't "normally" given knives should have been something a cub reporter would have laughed at. But clearly journalism was not what was going on at The New Republic where there was no interest in exposing the atrocities committed by the Contras. It was all about pushing a hawkish foreign policy and serving the Reagan agenda.

A Contra Exposé

That sort of behavior continued throughout the Reagan era with one notable exception in fall 1986 when editor Jefferson Morley and investigative reporter Murray Waas asked me and my Associated Press colleague Brian Barger to expand the work that we had done exposing Oliver North's secret Contra support network into a New Republic cover story.

Our article appeared in November 1986 while Peretz was out of town visiting Israel. But he soon weighed in after receiving a furious letter from then-Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams, another arch-neocon. Abrams ostentatiously canceled his TNR subscription in protest of our article, and Peretz responded to Abrams's complaint by excluding Waas from the magazine and putting Morley in the publisher's doghouse.

The situation could have gotten worse for those who had a hand in bringing our story into the magazine, except that the Iran-Contra scandal broke wide open in November 1986, confirming that Barger and I had been right about North's secret network. Abrams eventually pleaded guilty to misleading Congress (though he was later pardoned by President George H.W. Bush and was brought into President George W. Bush's National Security Council to oversee Middle East policy, including the invasion of Iraq).

The New Republic's pattern of playing fast and loose with the facts would eventually cause the magazine some embarrassment in 1998 when it was caught publishing a number of fabrications by writer Stephen Glass. But TNR never was held accountable for its support for atrocities in Central America, its pushing for illegal wars in the Middle East or its smearing of honest journalists and human rights investigators.

Though Peretz finally lost control of the magazine's content in 2010, The New Republic has remained an important vehicle for pushing the neocon agenda. Earlier this year, TNR published a long exaltation to American interventionism by neocon Robert Kagan, a co-founder of the Project for the New American Century and a leading proponent for the Iraq War.

In the essay, "[Superpowers Don't Get to Retire](#)," Kagan "depicted President Obama as presiding over an inward turn by the United States that threatened the global order and broke with more than 70 years of American presidents and precedence," wrote Jason Horowitz in the New York Times. "He called for Mr. Obama to resist a popular pull toward making the United States a nation without larger responsibilities, and to reassume the more muscular approach to the world out of vogue in Washington since the war in Iraq drained the country of its appetite for intervention."

President Barack Obama, who remains hypersensitive to criticism from well-placed and well-connected neocons, responded by inviting Kagan to lunch at the White House and shaping his foreign policy speech at West Point's graduation in May to deflect Kagan's criticism.

So, when you read the endless laments from the mainstream U.S. news media about the tragedy of having some Silicon Valley barbarians violating the sacred journalistic temple of The New Republic, you might reflect on all the suffering and death that the magazine has rationalized and intellectualized away.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest 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](#).

Shielding Israel's Secret Nukes

A glaring case of hypocrisy is that the U.S. government berates Iran for a non-weaponized nuclear program while fighting to protect Israel's large, sophisticated and undeclared nuclear arsenal, a double standard that led the Obama administration to oppose a nuclear-free Mideast, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar describes.

By Paul R. Pillar

The stated rationale for the United States casting last Tuesday one of the very lonely votes it sometimes casts at the United Nations General Assembly, on matters on which almost the entire world sees things differently, warrants some reflection.

The resolution in question this time endorsed the creation of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East and called on Israel to join the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, to renounce any possession of nuclear weapons, and to put its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

A nuclear weapons-free Middle East and universal adherence to the nonproliferation treaty are supposedly U.S. policy objectives, and have been for many years. So why did the United States oppose the resolution? According to the U.S. representative's statement in earlier debate, the resolution "fails to meet the fundamental tests of fairness and balance. It confines itself to expressions of concern about the activities of a single country."

You know something doesn't wash when the contrary views are as overwhelmingly held as on this matter. The resolution passed on a vote of 161-5. Joining Israel and the United States as "no" votes were Canada (maybe the Harper government was thinking of the Keystone XL pipeline issue being in the balance?) and the Pacific powers of Micronesia and Palau. The latter two habitually cast their UN votes to stay in the good graces of the United States; they have been among the few abstainers on the even more lopsided votes in the General Assembly each year calling for an end to the U.S. embargo of Cuba.

An obvious problem with the United States complaining about a resolution on a topic such as this being an expression of concern about the activities of only a single country is that the United States has been in front in pushing for United Nations resolutions about the nuclear activities of a single country, only just not about the particular country involved this time.

The inconsistency is glaring. Iran has been the single-country focus of several U.S.-backed resolutions on nuclear matters, resolutions in the Security Council that have been the basis for international sanctions against Iran.

One could look, but would look in vain, for sound rationales for the inconsistency. If anything, the differences one would find should point U.S. policy in the opposite direction from the direction it has taken. It is Iran that has placed itself under the obligations of the nonproliferation treaty and subjects its nuclear activities to international inspection.

Since the preliminary agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program that was negotiated last year, those inspections are more frequent and intrusive than ever. Israel, by contrast, has kept its nuclear activities completely out of the reach of any international inspection or control regime. As for actual nuclear weapons, Iran does not have them, has declared its intention not to have them, and according to the U.S. intelligence community has not made any decision to make them.

Neither Israel nor the United States says publicly that Israel has nuclear weapons, but just about everyone else in the world takes it as a given that it does, which would make it the only state in the Middle East that does.

One might look, but still in vain, for justifying discrepancies that go beyond the respective nuclear programs of the countries in question but still involve questions of regional security and stability. What about, for example, menacing threats? Iran and Israel have each had plenty of unfriendly words about each other. Iran's words have included bloviation about wiping something from pages of history; Israel's have included more pointed threats of military attack.

What about actual attacks? Israel has initiated multiple wars with its neighbors, as well as launching smaller armed attacks; The Islamic Republic of Iran has not started a war in its 35-year history. Terrorism? Well, there were those assassinations of Iranian scientists, with some later attacks against Israelis being an obvious (and not very successful) attempt by Iran at a tit-for-tat response against those responsible for murdering the scientists. And so forth.

Singling out one country in a multilateral context can indeed cause problems. The resolution the General Assembly passed this week need not involve a problem, however, since it was not calling for differential *treatment* of anyone, only for Israel to get with the same program as any state in the Middle East that does not have nukes and adheres to the international nuclear control regime.

Iran, by contrast, is being treated much differently from anyone else. Tehran already has acquiesced to some of that differential treatment, but Iranians unsurprisingly wonder why Iran should be subjected to more such treatment, or indeed to any of it. They wonder, for example, why Iran should be subject to unique restrictions that several other non-nuclear-weapons states that also are parties to the nonproliferation treaty and enrich their own uranium are not.

Such wonderment is almost certainly a factor in Iranian resistance to making the sorts of additional concessions that many in the United States are expecting or demanding that Iran make. The differential treatment should be kept in mind in any discussion in the United States about who has made bigger concessions than

whom and about what would or would not constitute a fair and reasonable final agreement.

Then there is the irony, although Iranians might use a more bitter word than *irony*, of Israel leading the charge in constantly agitating about Iran's nuclear program (and by trying to torpedo an international agreement to restrict that program, making the issue fester and thus making it more possible for Israel's agitation to go on forever).

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Stifling Dissent on the Upper East Side

Exclusive: Modern U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine doesn't just target people in faraway lands where the U.S. military is battling some uprising. It also takes aim at Americans whose dissent might undermine those wars, possibly explaining the strange arrest of Ray McGovern, writes retired JAG Major Todd E. Pierce.

By Todd E. Pierce

Did COIN or counterinsurgency doctrine come to New York's Upper East Side in late October? One might think so when a critic of retired Gen. David Petraeus was denied entry to a public event and then roughly arrested by New York police.

On Oct. 30, this generation's COIN deity David Petraeus and acolytes John Nagl and Max Boot were to discuss "national security" at an event open to the public at the Upper East Side Y. However, when former CIA analyst and war critic Ray McGovern arrived with ticket in hand, he was "neutralized," as the COIN practitioners might put it.

McGovern was greeted by a security official who addressed McGovern by name and seemed to be expecting him. The security official told McGovern he was "not welcome" and denied him entry, ticket or no ticket. Not only did the security officer seem to expect McGovern, but NYPD reinforcements were on hand to arrest McGovern on charges of trespassing, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

The 75-year-old ex-CIA analyst, who was suffering from a shoulder injury, had his arms pulled painfully behind him as he was handcuffed, causing him to scream in pain. He was then transported to jail where he spent the night on a metal

cot.

McGovern wrote afterward: "But one mystery lingers. The 'organs of state security' (the words used by the Soviets to refer to their intelligence/security services) were lying in wait for me when I walked into the Y? Why? How on earth did they know I was coming?"

McGovern's answer to his own question was that it would seem the group that he was staying with was the target of an intelligence collection operation. That is what one would expect the authorities to do to "counter insurgents" in a foreign nation where U.S. forces operate, as Petraeus's Counterinsurgency Manual explains. Or, you might see it in a nation under an authoritarian political system, what we used to call a Police State before we Americans adopted those same methods.

But the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is supposed to prevent the suppression of public speech by government or quasi-government officials. That was the principle at least, until the 9/11 attacks "changed everything."

Unlimited Powers

On Oct. 23, 2001, six weeks after those attacks, Justice Department officials Robert Delahunty and John Yoo signed an Office of Legal Counsel Opinion entitled "Authority for Use of Military Force To Combat Terrorist Activities Within the United States," essentially giving President George W. Bush, as the "Commander in Chief," the power to impose martial law.

Yoo/Delahunty wrote in that opinion that the Fourth Amendment did not apply to military operations within the United States, which would logically include operations by the National Security Agency, an intelligence agency within the Department of Defense, i.e., surveillance operations against the U.S. population.

Yoo/Delahunty also claimed: "First Amendment speech and press rights may also be subordinated to the overriding need to wage war successfully. 'When a nation is at war many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight and that no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right.'"

This assertion that the Constitution's safeguards of a citizen's rights must be set aside at a time of war even one as vague as the "war on terror" and must be replaced by the prerogative power of the military authorities, with the "Commander in Chief" at the top, acting under a theory of unlimited presidential powers, is descriptive of martial law.

Or as the Supreme Court once said, “what is termed martial law, but which would be better called martial rule, for it is little else than the will of the commanding general sometimes advanced by men, with more zeal than wisdom and is at variance with every just notion of a free government.”

All the available evidence, principally the DOD/NSA’s spying-on-citizens program, would indicate that martial law was instituted under the Bush regime and remains in place with continued domestic DOD/NSA spying under the Obama regime. That authority for domestic military operations would logically include COIN, a menu of tactics so extensive that it covers everything from full-scale army operations to the control of undesired political speech.

This is what Ray McGovern can be said to have encountered at the Upper East Side Y. It is irrelevant that no military personnel were on hand, other than retired military officers. Martial law is not limited to only the military exercising the prerogative power of the Commander in Chief; it is most successful when citizens themselves take on the task of enforcing the “Commander’s intent,” in whole or in part.

Nor is it necessary that martial law be publicly declared. For example, the removal of the Japanese-Americans from the West Coast during World War II at the instigation of General John L. DeWitt was an example of martial law. It wasn’t called that for political purposes, just as it is not called that now, even though the military, via the DOD’s NSA, continues to conduct a military operation against U.S. citizens.

The McGovern Case

So here is the logic of a COIN operation and how that can hypothetically be seen as having been executed against Ray McGovern: Part of COIN theory deals with control of information, sometimes called “information warfare,” in which the enemy’s propaganda and other communications are blocked or undermined and your own messaging is left unchallenged.

From the 2014 version of the COIN Manual, or FM 3-24, “Information Operations” are defined as information-related capabilities “to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decisionmaking of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.” Part of the strategy is for “our own” side to influence a “target audience” while making sure the enemy is frustrated in similar attempts.

At the Oct. 30 event, Petraeus, Nagl and Boot given the role they’ve played promoting COIN might very easily see their public speaking through a COIN lens. Thus, their listeners that evening would constitute a “target audience” whom the speakers clearly intended to influence. And, Ray McGovern by planning to

challenge Petraeus during the Q-and-A could be viewed as the “enemy” or at least someone aiding the “enemy” cause.

McGovern, though a longtime intelligence analyst for the U.S. Army and the CIA, has emerged as an internationally known antiwar political activist who, in 2006, publicly challenged Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld about his false statements regarding Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, a confrontation that led evening news shows, energized domestic critics of the Iraq War and arguably in Petraeus’s view undermined public support for the war.

FM 3-24 explains, “Threat characteristics involve the activities, and tactics of an insurgency. Tactics for an insurgency include political activities. The use of political activities to influence a society is another political activity of an insurgency.”

These activities include “Demonstrations, propaganda, strikes, and civil disobedience. Propaganda is one of the most important political tools an insurgency has” by providing the means for an insurgency “to communicate a message, often political, to the population.” This allows an “insurgency to create a narrative of why the government’s actions are not legitimate.”

In other words, McGovern might have asked a pointed question that would counter the message that Petraeus was seeking to convey to the audience, particularly that his COIN policies have protected America from its “enemies” and thus must be continued.

McGovern said his hope was to ask Petraeus, who had been responsible for training the Iraqi army, why that training had failed to prevent the Iraqi army from fleeing the battlefield when confronted by militants from the Islamic State. “Will you come out of retirement and try to do it better this time to train the Iraqi forces?” McGovern said, describing his intended question.

In other words, McGovern’s question might have popped the inflated bubble around Petraeus’s reputation and raised doubts about whether the general’s counterinsurgency warfare had actually done much to protect Americans.

Repression Coming Home

But one may ask, this was at the 92nd St. Y in New York City, not an overseas country where the U.S. is currently applying COIN? FM 3-24 explains, however: “A *center of gravity* (emphasis in original) is the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act. Counterinsurgents must understand their own center of gravity and that of the host nation. In many cases, political support is the strategic center of gravity for the U.S.”

That is, if political support among the American people for the U.S. military's counterinsurgent policies is lost, then the insurgents win, according to this COIN theory. Much of this thinking stems from the supposed "lessons" of Vietnam where many generals blamed the U.S. defeat not on their own failings but on the success of "enemy propaganda."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the Vietcong targeted the U.S. media and American antiwar activists, causing the public to lose faith in and patience with the war. After the war finally ended, Gen. William Westmoreland and other generals complained that the U.S. news media gave moral support to the enemy through critical reporting about the war and helped turn the American people against the conflict.

But the American people didn't need the media to tell them about this failed war; they had evidence from the many funerals of dead servicemen and anecdotal stories from returning soldiers. Subsequent studies, including by U.S. military historians, have further debunked the military's "stabbed-in-the-back" complaint, blaming the defeat instead on an unwinnable strategy and the staggering loss of life.

But the "enemy within" myth continued to dominate much of U.S. military's thinking about the Vietnam War, including Petraeus's updated counterinsurgency manuals and subsequent ones. "In a counterinsurgency, the insurgent often targets the U.S. population with themes and messages concerning the insurgency," FM 3-24 asserts. In other words, American anti-war activists, who question the U.S. government's own propaganda themes or who give credence to the arguments from the other side, are still being viewed as "enemies within" who must be neutralized.

Of course, this outlook overlooks what has been a central tenet of al-Qaeda's strategy to draw the United States deeper into the Middle East in order to exhaust America financially and militarily, to keep the U.S. locked in this conflict until it suffers a devastating strategic defeat much as was done to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. But to military COIN theorists, like Petraeus and Boot, al-Qaeda's scheme is outside the scope of their analytical ability.

The Information Battlefield

So, in the minds of the totalitarian-oriented COIN theorists, the war is really about information and the battlefield is everywhere. According to this doctrine, "Insurgent support activities include communications. These support activities sustain insurgencies and allow for both military and political actions. They are enabled by an insurgency's ability to generate popular support. These networks

can include support from other nations or from population groups outside the country.”

This paranoid viewpoint is, of course, not unprecedented. Indeed, it has been common for authoritarian systems to label dissent against their war policies as support for insurgents or other “subversives.” This attitude has been a common denominator of nearly all despotic military regimes from Hitler’s Germany to Pinochet’s Chile to modern Egypt under a variety of military rulers: dissent equals treason.

In fact, the COIN Manual cites as an example the case of the Tamil Tigers and the alleged support these insurgents received from civilians of the Tamil diaspora following ethnic riots against the Tamil people that drove many to flee Sri Lanka. According to the manual, this global diaspora then became a major part of the Tamil Tigers’ “propaganda network,” a statement that would be a bit like charging German Jewish immigrants pre-World War II of being part of an American “propaganda network” for telling the truth about conditions in Germany.

FM 3-24 does acknowledge that a prerequisite for an insurgency is “Motive” but adds that grievances alone are not sufficient to spur an insurgency. It takes leaders “to build a compelling narrative that links grievances to a political agenda and mobilizes the population to support a violent social movement. When grievances mobilize a population, they are a root cause of an insurgency. The presence of a foreign force can be the root cause of an insurgency.”

While all that is well and good and would apply to almost all political uprisings including the American Revolution the lessons drawn from this current obsession with “counterinsurgency” veers off into some dangerous directions. Behind it is the assumption that virtually all insurgencies at least those not initiated by Washington deserve countering.

Yet, sometimes, indeed often, insurgencies reflect the urgent desires of an oppressed people for justice, meaning that modern counterinsurgency warfare, as practiced by Gen. Petraeus and other U.S. strategists, can become just one more boot on the people’s neck.

It also follows that the COIN’s obsessive practitioners will begin to detect the enemy within the United States, since the information war is global and the counterinsurgency operation must protect itself against a loss of political will among the American people. Thus, a citizen who asserts that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq was to blame for the Iraqi insurgency could be accused of enabling the insurgency, being part of the enemy’s “propaganda network.”

In counterinsurgency thinking, “external support” for an insurgency can be

something as vague as “moral support.”

The Insurgent ‘Network’

Another pertinent dynamic identified in the COIN Manual is “Organizational and Operational Patterns,” which can be almost as ambiguous as “moral support.” It is explained that “Insurgents may be organized into networks,” a series of “direct and indirect ties from one entity to a collection of entities. Insurgent networking extends the range and variety of both insurgent military and political actions. Networks of communications, people, and activities exist in all populations and have a measurable impact on the organized governance of a population and, consequently, military operations.”

So “networks” are not limited to insurgents inside the foreign nation where the insurgency is active; these “direct and indirect ties” can extend to all populations and include a variety of friendly, neutral and threat networks, each meriting its own treatment.

Individuals in a network are called “actors or nodes.” Connections between nodes are links, and a link between two people is a “dyad.” Understanding dyads is essential to understand the nature of an insurgency, per the FM 3-24’s doctrine.

This is accomplished through “network mapping, charting, and social network analysis,” which are “intelligence products that can aid in refined analysis and course of action developments.” Intelligence collection for this purpose would be in the manner of total surveillance, electronically and digitally, as the NSA is alleged to be engaged in globally, including inside the United States.

So what does a counterinsurgent do when encountering a “network?” FM 3-24 prescribes the solution: attack the network.

“Attack the network operations consist of activities that employ lethal and nonlethal means to support friendly networks, influence neutral networks, and neutralize threat networks.” Thus, an individual node, a dyad or a larger group providing external moral support to an insurgency whose root cause is the presence of U.S. forces in that country or region would be defined as a “threat network” which would need to be “neutralized.”

At least one type of network as described in the COIN Manual, “friendly,” and maybe the second sort, “neutral,” were present at the 92nd Street Y when Ray McGovern approached with a ticket in hand. As an antiwar activist who has called for U.S. troop withdrawals from countries where U.S. forces have been engaged in counterinsurgency, Petraeus’s COIN doctrine and its totalitarian view of the world would put McGovern into the “threat network” as perhaps a “peripheral node,” even though he does not support any of the insurgents in those conflicts.

But actual support is not required to become part of a “threat network,” just behavior that causes trouble for the counterinsurgency strategy or that could be interpreted as undermining the information warfare campaign against the enemy or that could be seen as lending “moral support.” And, according to the COIN Manual, these “threat networks” must be *neutralized* to protect friendly forces and populations while creating time and space for other counterinsurgency operations to succeed.

While the talks by Petraeus, Nagl and Boot could be expected to bolster “friendly networks,” McGovern threatened to undermine that effort by posing a critical or embarrassing question to Petraeus. Thus, the doctrine called for taking “direct actions against threats, reducing their functionality and impact, in order to set conditions for supporting friendly networks and influencing neutral networks. The goal is to change the perceptions and behaviors of neutral audiences to support the achievement of U.S., multinational, and host nation objectives.”

Getting in the Way

According to the doctrine, it is not necessary that the forces neutralizing a node in a network be military; in fact, “If the police have a reasonable reputation for competence and impartiality, it may be better for them to execute urban raids than military forces because the population is more likely to view their application of force as legitimate.”

Of course, we can’t say for sure at this time what prompted the preemptive strike against McGovern and his troublesome question. The precise scenario of who instigated the arrest might emerge from future court proceedings or the details might always remain a mystery.

Perhaps the incident was not organized by senior practitioners of counterinsurgency strategy, even though the speakers that night were well versed in these theories. Another possible interpretation is that some individuals who simply despise dissent a right-wing goon squad in the mold of old-time fascist storm troopers took it upon themselves to squelch McGovern’s attempt to exercise his First Amendment rights.

Either analysis could be correct and might not represent much of a distinction because COIN doctrine has become something of a secular religion in many political circles in the United States, a disdain for people who challenge the government’s assertion of “national security.” That anger at anti-war dissent has percolated from the top down and gained an official imprimatur through the “war on terror.”

After all, COIN amounts to the exercise of military rule over a given area while all forms of force from full-scale army operations to paramilitary killings to dissemination of propaganda to political activity are used to crush the resistance.

In the case of neutralizing Ray McGovern at the 92nd Street Y on Oct. 30 a mission carried out by the NYPD and private security operatives the tactics of COIN doctrine were on display. So was the possible motive: the need to suppress McGovern's question that might have undercut the U.S. government's counterinsurgency goals.

Todd E. Pierce retired as a Major in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps in November 2012. His most recent assignment was defense counsel in the Office of Chief Defense Counsel, Office of Military Commissions.

Consortiumnews Sets End-of-Year Goal

From Editor Robert Parry: We are setting the goal for our end-of-year fund drive at \$50,000, not a huge sum but enough so we can put Consortiumnews on a firmer financial footing. That means we will need help from small, medium and large donors.

I know that there are lots of worthy causes that are seeking your help at this time of year and there are family needs as well. But what we have tried to do for 19 years at Consortiumnews is arm our readers with reliable and important information that empowers you to make the world a better and safer place.

That is especially important when so many forces are pushing in the opposite direction, providing false or slanted information to justify anger and hatred that make the world much more dangerous. Just this past year, Consortiumnews was one of the few voices challenging Official Washington's warmongering over Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere.

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Again, thanks for your support and for making our 19 years of honest journalism possible.

Robert Parry is a longtime investigative reporter who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He founded Consortiumnews.com in 1995 to create an outlet for well-reported journalism that was being squeezed out of an increasingly trivialized U.S. news media.

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From Editor Robert Parry: I want to apologize to any readers who were inadvertently dropped from our email list for story notifications. Because the vendor handling that email service was raising rates based on size of email lists, we tried to purge “dead emails” but may have got some live ones, too. So...

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