

Murdoch, Scaife and CIA Propaganda

Special Report: The rapid expansion of America's right-wing media began in the 1980s as the Reagan administration coordinated foreign policy initiatives with conservative media executives, including Rupert Murdoch, and then cleared away regulatory hurdles, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The Reagan administration pulled right-wing media executives Rupert Murdoch and Richard Mellon Scaife into a CIA-organized "perception management" operation which aimed Cold War-style propaganda at the American people in the 1980s, according to declassified U.S. government records.

Although some records relating to Murdoch remain classified, several documents that have been released indicate that he and billionaire Scaife were considered sources of financial and other support for President Ronald Reagan's hard-line Central American policies, including the CIA's covert war in Nicaragua.

A driving force behind creation of Reagan's extraordinary propaganda bureaucracy was CIA Director William Casey who dispatched one of the CIA's top covert action specialists, Walter Raymond Jr., to the National Security Council to oversee the project. According to the documents, Murdoch was brought into the operation in 1983 when he was still an Australian citizen and his media empire was much smaller than it is today.

Charles Wick, director of the U.S. Information Agency, arranged at least two face-to-face meetings between Murdoch and Reagan, the first on Jan. 18, 1983, when the administration was lining up private financing for its propaganda campaign, according to records at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California. That meeting also included lawyer and political operative Roy Cohn and his law partner Thomas Bolan.

The Oval Office meeting between Reagan and Murdoch came just five days after NSC Advisor William Clark noted in a Jan. 13, 1983 memo to Reagan the need for non-governmental money to advance the project. "We will develop a scenario for obtaining private funding," Clark wrote, as cited in [an unpublished draft chapter](#) of the congressional Iran-Contra investigation.

Clark then told the President that "Charlie Wick has offered to take the lead. We may have to call on you to meet with a group of potential donors."

The documents suggest that Murdoch was soon viewed as a source for that funding. In an Aug. 9, 1983 memo summing up the results of a Casey-organized meeting with

five leading ad executives regarding how to “sell” Reagan’s aggressive policies in Central America, Raymond referred to Murdoch as if he already were helping out.

In a memo to Clark, entitled “Private Sector Support for Central American Program,” Raymond criticized a more traditional White House outreach program headed by Faith Whittlesey as “preaching to the converted.”

Raymond told Clark that the new project would involve a more comprehensive approach aimed at persuading a majority of Americans to back Reagan’s Central American policies, which included support for right-wing regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador as well as the Contra rebels fighting the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

“We must move out into the middle sector of the American public and draw them into the ‘support’ column,” Raymond wrote. “A second package of proposals deal with means to market the issue, largely considering steps utilizing public relations specialists or similar professionals to help transmit the message.”

To improve the project’s chances for success, Raymond wrote, “we recommended funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center. Wick, via Murdoch, may be able to draw down added funds for this effort.”

Raymond included similar information in a separate memo to Wick in which Raymond noted that “via Murdock [sic] may be able to draw down added funds” to support the initiative. (Raymond later told me that he was referring to Rupert Murdoch.)

In a March 7, 1984 memo about the “‘Private Funders’ Project,” Raymond referred to Murdoch again in discussing a request for money from longtime CIA-connected journalist Brian Crozier, who was “looking for private sector funding to work on the question of ‘anti-Americanism’ overseas.”

Raymond wrote: “I am persuaded [sic] it is a significant long term problem. It is also the kind of thing that Ruppert [sic] and Jimmy might respond positively to. Please look over the stack [of papers from Crozier] and lets [sic] discuss if and when there might be further discussion with our friends.”

Crozier, who died in 2012, had a long history of operating in the shadowy world of CIA propaganda. He was director of *Forum World Features*, which was set up in 1966 by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which received covert funding from the CIA. Crozier also acknowledged in his memoir keeping some of his best stories for the CIA.

At least one other document related to Murdoch’s work with USIA Director Wick

remains classified, according to the National Archives. Murdoch's News Corp. has not responded to requests for comment about the Reagan-era documents.

Helping Murdoch

Murdoch, who became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1985 to meet a regulatory requirement that U.S. TV stations must be owned by Americans, benefited from his close ties to both U.S. and British officialdom.

On Monday, the UK's Independent reported that Ed Richards, the retiring head of the British media regulatory agency Ofcom, accused British government representatives of showing favoritism to Murdoch's companies.

Richards said he was "surprised" by the informality, closeness and frequency of contact between executives and ministers during the failed bid by Murdoch's News Corp. for the satellite network BSkyB in 2011. The deal was abandoned when it was discovered that journalists at Murdoch's *News of the World* tabloid had hacked the phone of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler and others.

"What surprised everyone about it not just me was quite how close it was and the informality of it," Richards said, confirming what had been widely reported regarding Murdoch's access to powerful British politicians dating back at least to the reign of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The Reagan documents suggest that Murdoch built similarly close ties to leading U.S. politicians in the same era.

In 1983, Murdoch's rising media empire was still based in Australia with only a few U.S. properties, such as the Star tabloid and the New York Post. But he was eyeing expansion into the U.S. media market. In 1984, he bought a stake in 20th Century Fox and then six Metromedia television stations, which would form the nucleus of Fox Broadcasting Company, which was founded on Oct. 9, 1986.

At the time, Murdoch and other media moguls were lobbying for a relaxation of regulations from the Federal Communications Commission, a goal that Reagan shared. Under FCC Chairman Mark Fowler, the Reagan administration undertook a number of steps favorable to Murdoch's interests, including increasing the number of TV stations that any single entity could own from seven in 1981 to 12 in 1985.

In 1987, the "Fairness Doctrine," which required political balance in broadcasting, was eliminated, which enabled Murdoch to pioneer a more aggressive conservatism on his TV network. In the mid-1990s, Murdoch expanded his political reach by founding the neoconservative Weekly Standard in 1995 and Fox News on cable in 1996. At Fox News, Murdoch has hired scores of prominent politicians, mostly Republicans, putting them on his payroll as commentators.

Last decade, Murdoch continued to expand his reach into U.S. mass media, acquiring DirecTV and the financial news giant Dow Jones, including The Wall Street Journal, America's leading business news journal.

Scaife's Role

Richard Mellon Scaife exercised his media influence on behalf of Reagan and the conservative cause in a different way. While the scion of the Mellon banking, oil and aluminum fortune did publish a right-wing newspaper in Pittsburgh, the Tribune Review, Scaife mostly served as a financial benefactor for right-wing journalists and think tanks.

Indeed, Scaife was one of the original financiers of what emerged as a right-wing counter-establishment in media and academia, a longstanding goal of key Republicans, including President Richard Nixon who recognized the importance of propaganda as a political weapon.

According to Nixon's chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, as reported in *The Haldeman Diaries*, one of Nixon's pet ideas was to build a network of loyal conservatives in positions of influence. The President was "pushing again on project of building our establishment in press, business, education, etc.," Haldeman wrote in one entry on Sept. 12, 1970.

Financed by rich conservative foundations and wealthy special interests, Nixon's brainchild helped tilt politics in favor of the American Right with Richard Mellon Scaife one of the project's big-money godfathers. By using family foundations, such as Sarah Scaife and Carthage, Scaife joined with other leading right-wing foundations to fund think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, which Scaife helped launch in 1973.

In 1978, Nixon's friend and Treasury Secretary William Simon provided more impetus to this growing machine, declaring in his book, *Time for Truth*: "Funds generated by business ... must rush by the multimillion to the aid of liberty ... to funnel desperately needed funds to scholars, social scientists, writers and journalists who understand the relationship between political and economic liberty."

With Reagan's inauguration in 1981 and Casey's selection as CIA director Scaife and other right-wing ideologues were in position to merge their private funding with U.S. Government money in pursuit of the administration's geopolitical goals, including making sure the American people would not break ranks as many did over the Vietnam War.

Building the Operation

On Nov. 4, 1982, Raymond, after his transfer from CIA to the NSC staff but while still a CIA officer, wrote to NSC Advisor Clark about the "Democracy Initiative and Information Programs," stating that "Bill Casey asked me to pass on the following thought concerning your meeting with Dick Scaife, Dave Abshire [then a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board], and Co.

"Casey had lunch with them today and discussed the need to get moving in the general area of supporting our friends around the world. By this definition he is including both 'building democracy' and helping invigorate international media programs. The DCI [Casey] is also concerned about strengthening public information organizations in the United States such as Freedom House.

"A critical piece of the puzzle is a serious effort to raise private funds to generate momentum. Casey's talk with Scaife and Co. suggests they would be very willing to cooperate. Suggest that you note White House interest in private support for the Democracy initiative."

In subsequent years, Freedom House emerged as a leading critic of Nicaragua's Sandinista government, which Reagan and Casey were seeking to overthrow by covertly supporting the Contra rebels. Freedom House also became a major recipient of money from the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, which was founded in 1983 under the umbrella of the Casey-Raymond project.

The role of the CIA in these initiatives was concealed but never far from the surface. A Dec. 2, 1982 note addressed to "Bud," a reference to senior NSC official Robert "Bud" McFarlane, described a request from Raymond for a brief meeting. "When he [Raymond] returned from Langley [CIA headquarters], he had a proposed draft letter re \$100 M democ[racy] proj[ect]," the note said.

While Casey pulled the strings on this project, the CIA director instructed White House officials to hide the CIA's role. "Obviously we here [at CIA] should not get out front in the development of such an organization, nor should we appear to be a sponsor or advocate," Casey said in one undated letter to then-White House counselor Edwin Meese III as Casey urged creation of a "National Endowment."

On Jan. 21, 1983, Raymond updated Clark about the project, which also was reaching out to representatives from other conservative foundations, including Les Lenkowsky of Smith-Richardson, Michael Joyce of Olin and Dan McMichael of Mellon-Scaife. "This is designed to develop a broader group of people who will support parallel initiatives consistent with Administration needs and desires," Raymond wrote.

Bashing Teresa Heinz

One example of how Scaife's newspaper directly helped the Reagan administration can be seen in clippings from the Tribune-Review that I found in Raymond's files. On April 21, 1983, the newspaper published a package of stories suggesting illicit left-wing connections among groups opposed to nuclear war.

The articles leave little doubt that Scaife's newspaper is suggesting that these anti-war activists are communists or communist fellow travelers. One headline reads: "Reds Woo Some U.S. Peace Leaders."

Another article cites an accusation from one congressman in the 1950s, after hearings on foundation grants "to numerous Communists and Communist-front organizations," that "Here lies the story of how Communism and Socialism are financed in the U.S. where they get their money." The 1983 article then asks: "Is history repeating itself?"

Ironically, one of the philanthropists who is singled out in these red-baiting articles is Teresa Heinz, then married to Sen. John Heinz, R-Pennsylvania, who died in a 1991 plane crash. In 1995, Teresa Heinz married Sen. John Kerry, D-Massachusetts, who is currently Secretary of State.

The organizational role of Casey and Raymond in this domestic propaganda campaign raised concerns about the legality of having two senior CIA officials participating in a scheme to manage the perceptions of the American people.

Both in internal documents and a deposition to the congressional Iran-Contra committee, Raymond made clear his discomfort about the possible legal violation from his and Casey's roles. Raymond formally resigned from the CIA in April 1983, so, he said, "there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this."

That sensitivity was also reflected in press guidance prepared in case a reporter noted Raymond's CIA background and the problems it presented to the "public diplomacy" effort. If someone challenged press reports that asserted "there is no CIA involvement in the Public Diplomacy Program" and then asked "isn't Walt Raymond, a CIA employee, involved heavily?" the prescribed answer was:

"Walter Raymond is a member of the National Security Council staff. In the past he has worked for Defense, CIA and State. It is true that in the formative stages of the effort, Walt Raymond contributed many useful ideas. It is ironic that he was one of those who was most insistent that there be no CIA involvement in this program in any way.

"Indeed, it is a credit to the Agency that it has stressed throughout that the United States ought to be completely open about the programs it puts in place to

assist in the development of democratic institutions and that none of these programs should come under the aegis of the CIA. They do not want to be involved in managing these programs and will not be. We have nothing to hide here.”

If a reporter pressed regarding where Raymond last worked, the response was to be: “He retired from CIA. He is a permanent member of the National Security Council.” And, if pressed about Raymond’s duties, the scripted answer was: “His duties there are classified.” (Raymond’s last job at the CIA was Director of the Covert Action Staff with a specialty in propaganda and disinformation.)

Beyond how Raymond’s “classified duties” contradict the assertion that “we have nothing to hide here,” there was a more deceptive element of the press guidance: it didn’t mention the key role of CIA Director Casey in both organizing and directing the project and it suggested that Raymond’s role had been limited to offering “many useful ideas” when he was the hands-on, day-to-day manager of the operation.

Casey’s Hidden Hand

Casey’s secret role in the propaganda scheme continued well into 1986, as Raymond continued to send progress reports to his old boss, even as Raymond fretted in one memo about the need “to get [Casey] out of the loop.”

The “public diplomacy” operation was “the kind of thing which [Casey] had a broad catholic interest in,” Raymond shrugged during his Iran-Contra deposition. He then offered the excuse that Casey undertook this apparently illegal interference in domestic politics “not so much in his CIA hat, but in his adviser to the president hat.”

Though the Casey-Raymond teamwork ended with the exposure of the Iran-Contra scandal in late 1986 and with Casey’s death on May 6, 1987, its legacy continued with Scaife and other rich right-wingers funding ideological media that protected the flanks of President Reagan, his successor President George H.W. Bush and other Republicans of that era.

For instance, Scaife helped fund the work of Steven Emerson, who played a key role in “discrediting” investigations into whether Reagan’s 1980 campaign had sabotaged President Jimmy Carter’s hostage negotiations with Iran to gain an edge in that pivotal election. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Unmasking October Surprise Debunker.”](#)]

Scaife also helped finance the so-called “Arkansas Project” that pushed hyped and bogus scandals to damage the presidency of Bill Clinton. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Starr-gate: Cracks on the Right.”](#)]

Walter Raymond Jr. died on April 16, 2003. Richard Mellon Scaife died on July 4, 2014. But Rupert Murdoch, now 83, remains one of the most powerful media figures on earth, continuing to wield unparalleled influence through his control of Fox News and his vast media empire that stretches around the globe.

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](#)). 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](#).

The Islamic State Stumbles

Last summer, there was widespread hysteria across Official Washington over the seemingly unstoppable expansion of the brutal Islamic State and handwringing over President Obama's limited military response but the jihadist momentum now shows signs of stalling, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

The fortunes of the extreme and violent group known variously as ISIS/ISIL/Islamic State seem to have changed markedly during the past few months. This summer the group was commonly portrayed, amid much alarm, as a relentless juggernaut that was scooping up so much real estate that it was a threat to overrun Baghdad and much else far beyond.

But the progress that was so frightening to follow in maps in the newspaper has stopped. The juggernaut has stalled. There will be endless debate about the causes of this change of momentum, ranging from military measures that the United States has taken to the somewhat more enlightened policies of the Iraqi central government. These and other influences have their effects, but the larger phenomenon of the decline of ISIS, decline not just that has happened so far but is yet to come, can be explained most of all by the group's own policies and practices.

The abhorrent and inhumane methods of the group are a major part of that explanation. Just as we abhor such methods, it should be no surprise that most people in the Middle East abhor them, too. Methods such as the highly publicized killing of individual captives have, besides terrorizing ISIS's adversaries,

increased the prominence of the group and probably impressed would-be foreign recruits by showing that ISIS is the meanest, baddest, and most consequential organization engaged in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

But living under the rule of such a vicious group can be at least as repulsive to the locals as watching it from afar is to us. Such a way of exercising power locally is ultimately not a good way to win support. We saw a similar reaction in an earlier phase of the Iraqi civil war.

It behooves us to learn what we can, as those charged with directly confronting ISIS evidently are trying to do, about the basis for whatever appeal the group does have, and especially about any appealing ideas it offers. The good news is that ISIS offers hardly anything in the way of such ideas. It cannot become an ideological lodestar the way Osama bin Laden and his al-Qa'ida did, because ISIS offers nothing as original as Bin Laden's idea of hitting the far enemy as a way of getting eventually at despised near enemies.

The appeal of ISIS to its recruits has been based not on ideology but on directly and brutally establishing facts on the ground. The appeal reduces to the principle that everybody loves a winner. But ISIS has stopped winning. It is like a shark that must keep moving forward to survive, but it is not still moving forward.

The establishment by ISIS of a de facto mini-state was widely seen as an accomplishment and a sign of strength, but it also is a vulnerability. If you run a state, you are expected to make the trains run on time, and you will lose popularity if you don't. ISIS is demonstrating that it lacks the ability to manage a state, and people in the areas it controls, including even Raqqa, Syria, the major city it has held the longest, are suffering from a collapse of public services. Trying to run, however unsuccessfully, the mini-state also represents for the ISIS leadership a drain on attention and resources that might otherwise be used for expansion.

The proclamation of a caliphate, although it has had some value for the group in impressing and attracting foreign recruits, lacks the sanction and recognition that in the eyes of the vast majority of Muslims such a move is supposed to have. Mainstream Muslim scholars and religious authorities have avoided anything that even hints at recognition.

Some fundamentalist Salifis have even likened ISIS and the moves it has made to extremist outcasts at the time of the Prophet. To the extent that the self-styled caliphate is seen more as a usurpation of Muslim aspirations than a fulfillment of them, the proclamation of a caliphate will turn out to be more of a liability than an asset.

When an adversary is hurting his own cause, generally the most effective thing to do is to stand aside and not get in the way. This is true of political debate, civil wars, and many other forms of conflict. The United States cannot get entirely out of the way of this one, insofar as it can do a few things that, tactically and on a piecemeal basis, limit the short-term harm that ISIS inflicts.

But taking a longer-term and more strategic view, which recognizes how ISIS is hurting its own cause, for the United States to do less rather than trying to do more (especially more that is visible and kinetic) is apt to be the wisest course. Injecting new focal points for controversy and collateral damage, on the basis of which ISIS can make new appeals, is apt to slow the process of the group greasing the ramp of its own decline. It also is apt to make the United States more of a direct target of whatever harm the group is still able to inflict.

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

A \$1,000 Challenge Grant

From Editor Robert Parry: A longtime donor has offered a \$1,000 matching grant, meaning that your donations up to that amount will be doubled through the end of the year (with extra time for checks via snail mail). So, if you haven't yet donated to our year-end fund drive, now would be a great time to contribute.

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A CD of the historic joint appearance of the late Gary Webb and me, speaking in

December 1996 about the Contra-cocaine scandal at the Midnight Special bookstore in Santa Monica, California. Plus, an autographed copy of my book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press and Project Truth*, which describes how the CIA's inspector general finally acknowledged that the CIA did know about the Contra-cocaine smuggling and helped cover it up. (This information is featured in the new movie, "Kill the Messenger.")

Or a DVD of the 1991 Frontline documentary, "Election Held Hostage," which examines whether Ronald Reagan's campaign exploited the 1980 Iran hostage crisis to win the presidency. Plus, a signed copy of my newest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, which provides the latest documentary evidence on that Republican skullduggery.

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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.

What Would Jesus Do at Christmas?

America's widening gap between rich and poor is especially noticeable at Christmastime when the rich shower themselves with extravagant gifts and assuage their self-images by donating a few turkeys and a toy or two to the poor, a tradition that troubles Rev. Howard Bess.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

A turkey given to a poor person or family at Thanksgiving or Christmas is the great symbol of American generosity. The gifts of turkeys to the needy and toys for their children are given great publicity. Newspapers are full of pictures of smiling children and grateful women who have fallen on hard times.

Editors are quick to write glowing editorials about American generosity and heap praise on the well-to-do who support these charities. Add a bell ringer and a metal bucket at the door of every grocery store and the feel-good season for the "haves" is complete.

But the turkeys and toys programs are an embarrassment to the poor, and poor kids grow up in shame for their poverty. Yet, one of the complaints against poor people is that some are not grateful enough for these charities and some even abuse the give-away by getting in line at more than one distribution point.

A related complaint about Jesus was that he hung out too much with poor people and with those deemed dirty and unclean. Almost all his followers were peasants and expendables.

Many Christian churches try to make Jesus out to be middle-class and present him as a skilled, respected tradesman. But the truth is that he was not. His status as some sort of handyman put him between peasantry and being an expendable. He did not just hang out with the poor, he was one of them.

Jesus was a dangerous man because he had figured out how peasants got that way. Many of the stories that he told were told to start discussions about what rich

people were doing to them. One such story is recorded in Matthew Chapter 20. It is about the relationship between a rich landowner and day laborers.

The traditional interpretation of the parable is that the owner is a God figure and casts the laborers as ungrateful, grumbling sinners. This is a theological interpretation that is now questioned by a growing number of scholars.

The key to understanding the parable is to ask what the peasant audience of Jesus heard. If read as social commentary from that perspective, the rich owner is an unscrupulous man who had acquired the land by dishonesty, manipulation and greed. To the ears of the peasants and the disposables who listened to Jesus, the man was a hated owner who manipulated their lives and left them in unbearable poverty.

When the laborers of the story began grumbling among themselves about the business practices of the rich owner, the man took charge of the conversation and lectured the laborers. "Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"

The response of the rich owner in the story takes away the possibility of making him a loving God figure. He is plainly an arrogant rich man who believed his ownership gave him the right to set the rules of the relationship of owners and laborers.

Our modern American economy parallels the economy of Jesus's day. The gap between rich and poor is wide and growing wider, with an arrogant upper class that lives apart from the poor. The rich have gained enormous wealth through manipulation and the misuse of laborers.

The poor beg for a livable wage, a decent house to live in, good education and basic health care. The rich pit the poor against one another and continue to pay poverty wages. But rich people and those who have more than enough also want to look good, so at this time of year, they proclaim: "Let's give the destitute turkeys and toys."

The message of this column will not be popular. I can hear the plea of the "givers": "Are you criticizing our generosity?" My response is "No, I am suggesting there is a better way."

When the minimum wage is a living wage, when we have excellent education for all, when every American is decently housed, and when every American has access to good health care, the turkey-and-toy giveaway will no longer be needed and self-esteem will soar.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

Udall Urged to Disclose Full Torture Report

Sen. Mark Udall has called for the full release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on torture. However, as a still-sitting member of Congress, he has a constitutional protection to read most of the still-secret report on the Senate floor – and a group of intelligence veterans urges him to do just that.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senator Mark Udall

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Stopping Torture

We, the undersigned are veteran intelligence officers with a combined total of over 300 years of experience in intelligence work. We send you this open letter at what seems to be the last minute simply because we had been hoping we would not have to.

You seem on the verge of leaving the Senate without letting your fellow Americans know all they need to know about CIA torture. In the eight weeks since you lost your Senate seat you gave off signs that, during your last days in office, you would provide us with a fuller account of this sordid chapter in our country's history, exercising your right to immunity under the "Speech or Debate" clause in Article 1 of the Constitution.

Your rhetoric against torture and in defense of the Constitution has been strong, but we now sense a white flag beneath it. We fear you intend to silently steal away, and thus deny the American people their last best chance to learn what they need to know about the record of CIA torture.

We had been encouraged by your Dec. 10 speech on the Senate floor, in which you referred to the release of the Executive Summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee's Study on CIA torture the previous day and said: "My goal is to ensure the **full truth** comes out about this grim time in the history of the CIA and our nation, so that neither the CIA nor any future administration repeats the grievous mistake this important oversight work reveals." (our emphasis)

Very quickly, though, your goal became fuzzier. When Scott Raab of *Esquire Magazine* asked you right after your speech, "Do you think the remaining 6,000 or so pages will become public?" You answered: "I do. It's my fervent hope that they will be declassified. I will continue to call for the entire report to be declassified. The details are important ... the entire report ought to be released."

With all due respect, Senator, exactly who do you think is going to do that, if not you? Was your "goal to ensure the **full truth** comes out" more rhetoric than reality? We are extremely disappointed at your apparent readiness to throw in the towel.

You had told Raab on Nov. 21, "What happened [the torture, lying, and cover-up] broke faith with the Constitution," adding, "There are some that would like this report [the Senate Intelligence Committee Study] never to see the light of day. There are some that are running out the clock." Clearly, you are on to their game. Are you going to let the clock run out, when what we actually need is a full-court press?

A Fine Floor Speech

You called, again, for CIA Director John Brennan to resign, while at the same time noting that President Obama has expressed full confidence in him and has "demonstrated that trust by making no effort at all to rein him in." In your words, the CIA keeps "posing impediments or obstacles" to full disclosure of its "barbaric program" of torture. And you made light of Obama's merely stating, "Hopefully, we don't do it again in the future."

"That's not good enough," you added, and of course you are right. Finally, you complain: "If there's no real leadership from the White House helping the public understand that the CIA's torture program wasn't necessary and didn't save lives or disrupt terrorist plots, then what's to stop the next White House and CIA director from supporting torture? ...

"The CIA has lied to its overseers and the public, destroyed and tried to hold back evidence, spied on the Senate, made false charges against our staff, and lied about torture and the results of torture. And no one has been held to account. ... There are right now people serving at high-level positions at the agency who approved, directed, or committed acts related to the CIA's detention and interrogation program."

QED as you have demonstrated there is no "real leadership" in the White House on this transcendently important issue.

Thus, it struck us as disingenuous to finish, as you do, with a glaring non

sequitur. You call on our timid President to “purge his administration” of a CIA director in whom he says he has “full confidence,” together with the torture alumni and alumnae still tenaciously protected by the same director.

Again, with all due respect, it seems equally disingenuous to appeal to this President to declassify and release the earlier review ordered by former CIA Director Leon Panetta, the conclusions of which directly refute several of Brennan’s claims much less release the full 6,800-page study of which we are permitted only a heavily redacted “executive summary.”

You even include Panetta’s own observation that President Obama and Brennan both were unhappy with Panetta’s initial agreement with the committee to allow staff access to operational cables and other sensitive documents about the torture program.

So where is the real leadership going to come from? Clearly, not from the White House. Russian President Putin is going to give Crimea to NATO before Obama does any of the things you suggested. And you know it.

So where could the initiative come from in these final days before the Senate changes hands? Frankly, Senator Udall, we had been counting on you rising to the challenge before this unique opportunity is lost, probably forever.

Where We Are Coming From

We are, frankly, at a loss to explain your hesitancy your lack of follow-through toward your stated goal “to ensure the full truth comes out ... so that neither the CIA nor any future administration repeats the grievous mistake [of torture].”

If you summon the courage to discharge what you no doubt realize is your duty, there is no way you will end up in jail. Indeed, this is precisely the kind of situation the Founders had in mind when they wrote the “Speech or Debate” clause into Article 1 of the Constitution.

Whatever it is that you fear, you might keep in mind that several of us who lack the immunity you enjoy have paid and continue to pay a heavy price for exposing lies, injustice, and abuses like torture. One of us the first to reveal that those grisly kinds of torture (aka “enhanced interrogation techniques”) were approved at the highest level of government is in prison serving a 30-month sentence. A number of us have seen the inside of prisons for doing the right thing; and all of us know what it feels like to be shunned by former colleagues.

Also important, despite our many years of service as senior intelligence officers and our solid record for accuracy, we are effectively banned from the

so-called "mainstream media," which continues to prefer the role of security-state accomplice in disparaging, for example, the findings of the Senate Intelligence Committee Study. (Never mind that the study is based on indisputably original CIA cables and other documents.) In contrast, you are not banned from the media yet. You have a few more days; you need to use them.

In your "Additional Views" on the Senate committee Study released on Dec. 9, you applaud Sen. Dianne Feinstein "for seeing this project to completion." But wait. You are surely aware (1) that the project remains far from complete; and (2) that if you or one of your Senate colleagues do not move tout suite to release the full Study together with the earlier review commissioned by Panetta, the "project" will not be brought to "completion" any time soon unless a courageous whistleblower runs great risk and does what you can do with impunity.

Moreover, releasing the report, as you have the authority to do under the Constitution, would publicly demonstrate that at least one legal method of whistleblowing does exist. So when such truly illegal actions occur, even at the most senior levels, there is a way of righting wrongs.

You are correct to call the committee Study "one of the most significant examples of oversight in the history of the U.S. Senate." We imagine that the strong support you and Sen. Ron Wyden gave Sen. Feinstein helped make it so. And we join you both in applauding Sen. Feinstein's tenacity in getting the Study's 500-page executive summary released. John Brennan used every conceivable ruse to slow-roll and eviscerate the summary, but Sen. Feinstein faced him down. She achieved all she could, given the circumstances. But the project remains far from "completion."

In your "Additional Views" you note that, as a new member of the intelligence committee four years ago, you were "deeply disturbed to learn specifics about the flaws in the [torture] program, the misrepresentations, the brutality." You add that you wrote the President letters about this in May, June, and July of this year. Surely the lack of response told you something. Please not another letter to Obama. You need to go beyond letters.

Your Turn

Now it's your turn, Senator Udall. Put Constitution and conscience into play, together with the immunity you enjoy. You can and, in our view, your oath to the Constitution dictates that you must rise to the occasion and find a way to release the entire 6,800-page Study, including CIA's comments (but not redacted to a fare-thee-well). You need to put this at the very top of your job jar now, before it is too late.

The American people are owed the truth. As you have noted more than once, they are not likely to get it from Brennan or the President for that matter. Nor will it come from the mainstream media with their customary “on-the-one-hand-and-then-on-the-other” approach to journalism. Polling data on the widespread acceptance of using torture “to keep us safe” is a direct result of that kind of coverage as well as of the artful crafting of words and phrases in the questions asked in those surveys.

The comments of the many of the TV talking-torture heads seem almost designed to discourage viewers from reading the damning executive summary itself. Who wants to read such abhorrent stuff at Christmastime, anyway?

If those who approved and conducted torture are not held accountable, torture is a virtual certainty for the future. In that sense, you are quite right in saying that the Committee staff has done “seminal” work. The seeds have been sown for reining in an executive agency acting lawlessly; or, alternatively, for endorsing, out of fear, the practice of torture in the future.

John Brennan, those who were in the CIA chain of command for torture, and the co-opted lawyers and faux-psychologists who lent their needed skills to the enterprise may be a bit nervous over the next few days until you are safely gone. But there is little sign they actually expect you to rise to the challenge.

Indeed, Brennan and Co. seem intent on advertising their power and impunity by recently leaking the latest demonstration of lack of accountability. Surprise, surprise: the panel appointed by Brennan to investigate Brennan and his people for hacking into Senate Intelligence Committee computers has reportedly decided to hold no one accountable, including Brennan himself, who initially lied about it. Now we learn that he apparently authorized the hacking in the first place, so everyone involved receives a stay-out-of-jail-free card. Smug impunity needs to be challenged using your immunity.

Finally, Senator Udall, history books will record the release of the highly redacted summary of the five-year-in-the-making Senate report on torture. It will also record whether or not the Senate rose even if only in the form of a single, un-intimidated man, to expose truly and in fullness what was done in the name of the American people. Our history is replete with such individual acts of courage by Americans who put country before self. Will you join them?

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Thomas Drake, Defense Intelligence Senior Executive Service, NSA (resigned)

Daniel Ellsberg, former State Dept. & Defense Dept. Official (VIPS Associate)

Mike Gravel, former Senator from Alaska; former Army intelligence officer

Larry Johnson, CIA analyst & State Department/counterterrorism, (ret.)

John Kiriakou, former CIA counterterrorism operations officer; federal prison, Loretto, Pennsylvania

Edward Loomis, former Chief, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

David MacMichael, USMC & National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Ray McGovern, Army Infantry/Intelligence officer & CIA presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East (ret.)

Todd Pierce, MAJ, U.S. Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, Minneapolis Division Counsel & Special Agent, FBI (ret.)

Peter Van Buren, Department of State, Foreign Service Officer (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Ann Wright, Col., US Army (ret); Foreign Service Officer (ret.)

The Victory of ‘Perception Management’

Special Report: In the 1980s, the Reagan administration pioneered “perception management” to get the American people to “kick the Vietnam Syndrome” and accept more U.S. interventionism, but that propaganda structure continues to this day getting the public to buy into endless war, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

To understand how the American people find themselves trapped in today’s Orwellian dystopia of endless warfare against an ever-shifting collection of “evil” enemies, you have to think back to the Vietnam War and the shock to the ruling elite caused by an unprecedented popular uprising against that war.

While on the surface Official Washington pretended that the mass protests didn’t

change policy, a panicky reality existed behind the scenes, a recognition that a major investment in domestic propaganda would be needed to ensure that future imperial adventures would have the public's eager support or at least its confused acquiescence.

This commitment to what the insiders called "perception management" began in earnest with the Reagan administration in the 1980s but it would come to be the accepted practice of all subsequent administrations, including the present one of President Barack Obama.

In that sense, propaganda in pursuit of foreign policy goals would trump the democratic ideal of an informed electorate. The point would be not to honestly inform the American people about events around the world but to manage their perceptions by ramping up fear in some cases and defusing outrage in others depending on the U.S. government's needs.

Thus, you have the current hysteria over Russia's supposed "aggression" in Ukraine when the crisis was actually provoked by the West, including by U.S. neocons who helped create today's humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine that they now cynically blame on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Yet, many of these same U.S. foreign policy operatives outraged over Russia's limited intervention to protect ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine are demanding that President Obama launch an air war against the Syrian military as a "humanitarian" intervention there.

In other words, if the Russians act to shield ethnic Russians on their border who are being bombarded by a coup regime in Kiev that was installed with U.S. support, the Russians are the villains blamed for the thousands of civilian deaths, even though the vast majority of the casualties have been inflicted by the Kiev regime from indiscriminate bombing and from dispatching neo-Nazi militias to do the street fighting.

In Ukraine, the exigent circumstances don't matter, including the violent overthrow of the constitutionally elected president last February. It's all about white hats for the current Kiev regime and black hats for the ethnic Russians and especially for Putin.

But an entirely different set of standards has applied to Syria where a U.S.-backed rebellion, which included violent Sunni jihadists from the start, wore the white hats and the relatively secular Syrian government, which has responded with excessive violence of its own, wears the black hats. But a problem to that neat dichotomy arose when one of the major Sunni rebel forces, the Islamic State, started seizing Iraqi territory and beheading Westerners.

Faced with those grisly scenes, President Obama authorized bombing the Islamic State forces in both Iraq and Syria, but neocons and other U.S. hardliners have been hectoring Obama to go after their preferred target, Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, despite the risk that destroying the Syrian military could open the gates of Damascus to the Islamic State or al-Qaeda's Nusra Front.

Lost on the Dark Side

You might think that the American public would begin to rebel against these messy entangling alliances with the 1984-like demonizing of one new "enemy" after another. Not only have these endless wars drained trillions of dollars from the U.S. taxpayers, they have led to the deaths of thousands of U.S. troops and to the tarnishing of America's image from the attendant evils of war, including a lengthy detour into the "dark side" of torture, assassinations and "collateral" killings of children and other innocents.

But that is where the history of "perception management" comes in, the need to keep the American people compliant and confused. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration was determined to "kick the Vietnam Syndrome," the revulsion that many Americans felt for warfare after all those years in the blood-soaked jungles of Vietnam and all the lies that clumsily justified the war.

So, the challenge for the U.S. government became: how to present the actions of "enemies" always in the darkest light while bathing the behavior of the U.S. "side" in a rosy glow. You also had to stage this propaganda theater in an ostensibly "free country" with a supposedly "independent press."

From documents declassified or leaked over the past several decades, including an unpublished draft chapter of the congressional Iran-Contra investigation, we now know a great deal about how this remarkable project was undertaken and who the key players were.

Perhaps not surprisingly much of the initiative came from the Central Intelligence Agency, which housed the expertise for manipulating target populations through propaganda and disinformation. The only difference this time would be that the American people would be the target population.

For this project, Ronald Reagan's CIA Director William J. Casey sent his top propaganda specialist Walter Raymond Jr. to the National Security Council staff to manage the inter-agency task forces that would brainstorm and coordinate this "public diplomacy" strategy.

Many of the old intelligence operatives, including Casey and Raymond, are now dead, but other influential Washington figures who were deeply involved by these strategies remain, such as neocon stalwart Robert Kagan, whose first major job

in Washington was as chief of Reagan's State Department Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America.

Now a fellow at the Brookings Institution and a columnist at the Washington Post, Kagan remains an expert in presenting foreign policy initiatives within the "good guy/bad guy" frames that he learned in the 1980s. He is also the husband of Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who oversaw the overthrow of Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich last February amid a very effective U.S. propaganda strategy.

During the Reagan years, Kagan worked closely on propaganda schemes with Elliott Abrams, then the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America. After getting convicted and then pardoned in the Iran-Contra scandal, Abrams reemerged on President George W. Bush's National Security Council handling Middle East issues, including the Iraq War, and later "global democracy strategy." Abrams is now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

These and other neocons were among the most diligent students learning the art of "perception management" from the likes of Raymond and Casey, but those propaganda skills have spread much more widely as "public diplomacy" and "information warfare" have now become an integral part of every U.S. foreign policy initiative.

A Propaganda Bureaucracy

Declassified documents now reveal how extensive Reagan's propaganda project became with inter-agency task forces assigned to develop "themes" that would push American "hot buttons." Scores of documents came out during the Iran-Contra scandal in 1987 and hundreds more are now available at the Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, California.

What the documents reveal is that at the start of the Reagan administration, CIA Director Casey faced a daunting challenge in trying to rally public opinion behind aggressive U.S. interventions, especially in Central America. Bitter memories of the Vietnam War were still fresh and many Americans were horrified at the brutality of right-wing regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador, where Salvadoran soldiers raped and murdered four American churchwomen in December 1980.

The new leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua also was not viewed with much alarm. After all, Nicaragua was an impoverished country of only about three million people who had just cast off the brutal dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza.

So, Reagan's initial strategy of bolstering the Salvadoran and Guatemalan armies

required defusing the negative publicity about them and somehow rallying the American people into supporting a covert CIA intervention inside Nicaragua via a counterrevolutionary force known as the Contras led by Somoza's ex-National Guard officers.

Reagan's task was made tougher by the fact that the Cold War's anti-communist arguments had so recently been discredited in Vietnam. As deputy assistant secretary to the Air Force, J. Michael Kelly, put it, "the most critical special operations mission we have ... is to persuade the American people that the communists are out to get us."

At the same time, the White House worked to weed out American reporters who uncovered facts that undercut the desired public images. As part of that effort, the administration attacked New York Times correspondent Raymond Bonner for disclosing the Salvadoran regime's massacre of about 800 men, women and children in the village of El Mozote in northeast El Salvador in December 1981. Accuracy in Media and conservative news organizations, such as The Wall Street Journal's editorial page, joined in pummeling Bonner, who was soon ousted from his job.

But these were largely ad hoc efforts. A more comprehensive "public diplomacy" operation took shape beginning in 1982 when Raymond, a 30-year veteran of CIA clandestine services, was transferred to the NSC.

A slight, soft-spoken New Yorker who reminded some of a character from a John le Carré spy novel, Raymond was an intelligence officer who "easily fades into the woodwork," according to one acquaintance. But Raymond would become the sparkplug for this high-powered propaganda network, according to a draft chapter of the Iran-Contra report.

Though the draft chapter didn't use Raymond's name in its opening pages, apparently because some of the information came from classified depositions, Raymond's name was used later in the chapter and the earlier citations matched Raymond's known role. According to the draft report, the CIA officer who was 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] Casey and NSC Advisor William Clark that he be assigned to the NSC as [Donald] Gregg's successor [as coordinator of intelligence operations 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.”

During his Iran-Contra deposition, Raymond explained the need for this propaganda structure, saying: “We were not configured effectively to deal with the war of ideas.”

One reason for this shortcoming was that federal law forbade taxpayers’ money from being spent on domestic propaganda or grassroots lobbying to pressure congressional representatives. Of course, every president and his team had vast resources to make their case in public, but by tradition and law, they were restricted to speeches, testimony and one-on-one persuasion of lawmakers.

But things were about to change. In a Jan. 13, 1983, memo, NSC Advisor Clark foresaw the need for non-governmental money to advance this cause. “We will develop a scenario for obtaining private funding,” Clark wrote. (Just five days later, President Reagan personally welcomed media magnate Rupert Murdoch into the Oval Office for a private meeting, according to records on file at the Reagan library.)

As administration officials reached out to wealthy supporters, lines against domestic propaganda soon were crossed as the operation took aim not only at foreign audiences but at U.S. public opinion, the press and congressional Democrats who opposed funding the Nicaraguan 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 as well as of the U.S.-backed regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala, the Reagan administration created a full-blown, clandestine propaganda network.

In January 1983, President Reagan took the first formal step to create this unprecedented peacetime propaganda bureaucracy by signing National Security Decision Directive 77, entitled “Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security.” Reagan deemed it “necessary to strengthen the organization, planning and coordination of the various aspects of public diplomacy of the United States Government.”

Reagan ordered the creation of a special planning group within the National Security Council to direct these “public diplomacy” campaigns. The planning group would be headed by the CIA’s Walter Raymond Jr. and one of its principal arms would be a new Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America, housed at the State Department but under the control of the NSC.

CIA Taint

Worried about the legal prohibition barring the CIA from engaging in domestic propaganda, Raymond formally resigned from the CIA in April 1983, so, he said, "there would be no question whatsoever of any contamination of this."

But Raymond continued to act toward the U.S. public much like a CIA officer would in directing a propaganda operation in a hostile foreign country.

Raymond fretted, too, about the legality of Casey's ongoing involvement. Raymond confided in one memo that it was important "to get [Casey] out of the loop," but Casey never backed off and Raymond continued to send progress reports to his old boss well into 1986. It was "the kind of thing which [Casey] had a broad catholic interest in," Raymond shrugged during his Iran-Contra deposition. He then offered the excuse that Casey undertook this apparently illegal interference in domestic politics "not so much in his CIA hat, but in his adviser to the president hat."

As a result of Reagan's decision directive, "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 Iran-Contra chapter said. "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.

"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."

A "public diplomacy strategy paper," dated May 5, 1983, summed up the administration's problem. "As far as our Central American policy is concerned, the press perceives that: the USG [U.S. government] is placing too much emphasis on a military solution, as well as being allied with inept, right-wing governments and groups. ...The focus on Nicaragua [is] on the alleged U.S.-backed

'covert' war against the Sandinistas. Moreover, the opposition ... is widely perceived as being led by former Somozistas."

The administration's difficulty with most of these press perceptions was that they were correct. But the strategy paper recommended ways to influence various groups of Americans to "correct" the impressions anyway, removing what another planning document called "perceptual obstacles."

"Themes will obviously have to be tailored to the target audience," the strategy paper said.

Casey's Hand

As the Reagan administration struggled to manage public perceptions, CIA Director Casey kept his personal hand in the effort. On one muggy day in August 1983, Casey convened a meeting of Reagan administration officials and five leading ad executives at the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House to come up with ideas for selling Reagan's Central American policies to the American people.

Earlier that day, a national security aide had warned the P.R. men to their task with dire predictions that leftist governments would send waves of refugees into the United States and cynically flood America with drugs. The P.R. executives jotted down some thoughts over lunch and then pitched their ideas to the CIA director in the afternoon as he sat hunched behind a desk taking notes.

"Casey was kind of spearheading a recommendation" for better public relations for Reagan's Central America policies, recalled William I. Greener Jr., one of the ad men. Two top proposals arising from the meeting were for a high-powered communications operation inside the White House and private money for an outreach program to build support for U.S. intervention.

The results from the discussions were summed up in an Aug. 9, 1983, memo written by Raymond who described Casey's participation in the meeting to brainstorm how "to sell a 'new product' Central America by generating interest across-the-spectrum."

In the memo to then-U.S. Information Agency director Charles Wick, Raymond also noted that "via Murdock [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 had been recruited to be part of the covert propaganda operation. During this period, Wick arranged at least two face-to-face meetings between Murdoch and Reagan.

In line with the clandestine nature of the operation, Raymond also suggested routing the “funding via Freedom House or some other structure that has credibility in the political center.” (Freedom House would later emerge as a principal beneficiary of funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, which was also created under the umbrella of Raymond’s operation.)

As the Reagan administration pushed the envelope on domestic propaganda, Raymond continued to worry about Casey’s involvement. 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.

Meanwhile, Reich’s Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America (S/LPD) proved extremely effective in selecting “hot buttons” that would anger Americans about the Sandinistas. He also browbeat news correspondents who produced stories that conflicted with the administration’s “themes.” Reich’s basic M.O. was to dispatch his propaganda teams to lobby news executives to remove or punish out-of-step reporters with a disturbing degree of success. Reich once bragged that his office “did not give the critics of the policy any quarter in the debate.”

Another part of the office’s job was to plant “white propaganda” in the news media through op-eds secretly financed by the government. In one memo, Jonathan Miller, a senior public diplomacy official, informed White House aide Patrick Buchanan about success placing an anti-Sandinista piece in The Wall Street Journal’s friendly pages. “Officially, this office had no role in its preparation,” Miller wrote.

Other times, the administration put out “black propaganda,” outright falsehoods. In 1983, one such theme was designed to anger American Jews by portraying the Sandinistas as anti-Semitic because much of Nicaragua’s small Jewish community fled after the revolution in 1979.

However, the U.S. embassy in Managua investigated the charges and “found no verifiable ground on which to accuse the GRN [the Sandinista government] of anti-Semitism,” according to a July 28, 1983, cable. But the administration kept the cable secret and pushed the “hot button” anyway.

Black Hats/White Hats

Repeatedly, Raymond lectured his subordinates on the chief goal of the operation: “in the specific case of Nica[ragua], concentrate on gluing black hats on the Sandinistas and white hats on UNO [the Contras’ United Nicaraguan Opposition].” So Reagan’s speechwriters dutifully penned descriptions of

Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua as a “totalitarian dungeon” and the Contras as the “moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers.”

As one NSC official told me, the campaign was modeled after CIA covert operations abroad where a political goal is more important than the truth. “They were trying to manipulate [U.S.] public opinion ... using the tools of Walt Raymond’s trade craft which he learned from his career in the CIA covert operation shop,” the official admitted.

Another administration official gave a similar description to The Miami Herald’s Alfonso Chardy. “If you look at it as a whole, the Office of Public Diplomacy was carrying out a huge psychological operation, the kind the military conduct to influence the population in denied or enemy territory,” that official explained. [For more details, see Parry’s *Lost History*.]

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 Iran-Contra chapter depicted a 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.

The Iran-Contra draft chapter also 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."

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 the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America from the oversight of Secretary Shultz.

A Raymond-authored memo to Casey in August 1986 described the shift of the S/LPD office where Robert Kagan had replaced Reich to the control of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, which was headed by Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, who had tapped Kagan for the public diplomacy job.

Even after the Iran-Contra scandal unraveled in 1986-87 and Casey died of brain cancer on May 6, 1987, the Republicans fought to keep secret the remarkable story of the public diplomacy apparatus. As part of a deal to get three moderate Republican senators to join Democrats in signing the Iran-Contra majority report, Democratic leaders agreed to drop the draft chapter detailing the CIA's domestic propaganda role (although a few references were included in the executive summary). But other Republicans, including Rep. Dick Cheney, still issued a minority report defending broad presidential powers in foreign affairs.

Thus, the American people were spared the chapter's troubling conclusion: that a secret propaganda apparatus had existed, run by "one of the CIA's most senior specialists, sent to the NSC by Bill Casey, to create and coordinate an inter-agency public-diplomacy mechanism [which] did what a covert CIA operation in a foreign country might do. [It] attempted to manipulate the media, the Congress and public opinion to support the Reagan administration's policies."

Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome

The ultimate success of Reagan's propaganda strategy was affirmed during the tenure of his successor, George H.W. Bush, when Bush ordered a 100-hour ground war on Feb. 23, 1991, to oust Iraqi troops from Kuwait, which had been invaded the previous August.

Though Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had long been signaling a readiness to withdraw and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had negotiated a withdrawal arrangement that even had the blessings of top U.S. commanders in the field President Bush insisted on pressing ahead with the ground attack.

Bush's chief reason was that he and his Defense Secretary Dick Cheney saw the assault against Iraq's already decimated forces as an easy victory, one that would demonstrate America's new military capacity for high-tech warfare and

would cap the process begun a decade earlier to erase the Vietnam Syndrome from the minds of average Americans.

Those strategic aspects of Bush's grand plan for a "new world order" began to emerge after the U.S.-led coalition started pummeling Iraq with air strikes in mid-January 1991. The bombings inflicted severe damage on Iraq's military and civilian infrastructure and slaughtered a large number of non-combatants, including the incineration of some 400 women and children in a Baghdad bomb shelter on Feb. 13. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Recalling the Slaughter of Innocents.](#)"]

The air war's damage was so severe that some world leaders looked for a way to end the carnage and arrange Iraq's departure from Kuwait. Even senior U.S. military field commanders, such as Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, looked favorably on proposals for sparing lives.

But Bush was fixated on a ground war. Though secret from the American people at that time, Bush had long determined that a peaceful Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait would not be allowed. Indeed, Bush was privately fearful that the Iraqis might capitulate before the United States could attack.

At the time, conservative columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak were among the few outsiders who described Bush's obsession with exorcising the Vietnam Syndrome. On Feb. 25, 1991, they wrote that the Gorbachev initiative brokering Iraq's surrender of Kuwait "stirred fears" among Bush's advisers that the Vietnam Syndrome might survive the Gulf War.

"There was considerable relief, therefore, when the President ... made clear he was having nothing to do with the deal that would enable Saddam Hussein to bring his troops out of Kuwait with flags flying," Evans and Novak wrote. "Fear of a peace deal at the Bush White House had less to do with oil, Israel or Iraqi expansionism than with the bitter legacy of a lost war. 'This is the chance to get rid of the Vietnam Syndrome,' one senior aide told us."

In the 1999 book, *Shadow*, author Bob Woodward confirmed that Bush was adamant about fighting a war, even as the White House pretended it would be satisfied with an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal. "We have to have a war," Bush told his inner circle of Secretary of State James Baker, national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Gen. Colin Powell, according to Woodward.

"Scowcroft was aware that this understanding could never be stated publicly or be permitted to leak out. An American president who declared the necessity of war would probably be thrown out of office. Americans were peacemakers, not warmongers," Woodward wrote.

The Ground War

However, the "fear of a peace deal" resurfaced in the wake of the U.S.-led bombing campaign. Soviet diplomats met with Iraqi leaders who let it be known that they were prepared to withdraw their troops from Kuwait unconditionally.

Learning of Gorbachev's proposed settlement, Schwarzkopf also saw little reason for U.S. soldiers to die if the Iraqis were prepared to withdraw and leave their heavy weapons behind. There was also the prospect of chemical warfare that the Iraqis might use against advancing American troops. Schwarzkopf saw the possibility of heavy U.S. casualties.

But Gorbachev's plan was running into trouble with President Bush and his political subordinates who wanted a ground war to crown the U.S. victory. Schwarzkopf reached out to Gen. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to make the case for peace with the President.

On Feb. 21, 1991, the two generals hammered out a cease-fire proposal for presentation to the NSC. The peace deal would give Iraqi forces one week to march out of Kuwait while leaving their armor and heavy equipment behind. Schwarzkopf thought he had Powell's commitment to pitch the plan at the White House.

But Powell found himself caught in the middle. He wanted to please Bush while still representing the concerns of the field commanders. When Powell arrived at the White House late on the evening of Feb. 21, he found Bush angry about the Soviet peace initiative. Still, according to Woodward's *Shadow*, Powell reiterated that he and Schwarzkopf "would rather see the Iraqis walk out than be driven out."

In *My American Journey*, Powell expressed sympathy for Bush's predicament. "The President's problem was how to say no to Gorbachev without appearing to throw away a chance for peace," Powell wrote. "I could hear the President's growing distress in his voice. 'I don't want to take this deal,' he said. 'But I don't want to stiff Gorbachev, not after he's come this far with us. We've got to find a way out'."

Powell sought Bush's attention. "I raised a finger," Powell wrote. "The President turned to me. 'Got something, Colin?'," Bush asked. But Powell did not outline Schwarzkopf's one-week cease-fire plan. Instead, Powell offered a different idea intended to make the ground offensive inevitable.

"We don't stiff Gorbachev," Powell explained. "Let's put a deadline on Gorby's proposal. We say, great idea, as long as they're completely on their way out by, say, noon Saturday," Feb. 23, less than two days away.

Powell understood that the two-day deadline would not give the Iraqis enough time to act, especially with their command-and-control systems severely damaged by the air war. The plan was a public-relations strategy to guarantee that the White House got its ground war. "If, as I suspect, they don't move, then the flogging begins," Powell told a gratified president.

The next day, at 10:30 a.m., a Friday, Bush announced his ultimatum. There would be a Saturday noon deadline for the Iraqi withdrawal, as Powell had recommended. Schwarzkopf and his field commanders in Saudi Arabia watched Bush on television and immediately grasped its meaning.

"We all knew by then which it would be," Schwarzkopf wrote. "We were marching toward a Sunday morning attack."

When the Iraqis predictably missed the deadline, American and allied forces launched the ground offensive at 0400 on Feb. 24, Persian Gulf time.

Though Iraqi forces were soon in full retreat, the allies pursued and slaughtered tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers in the 100-hour war. U.S. casualties were light, 147 killed in combat and another 236 killed in accidents or from other causes. "Small losses as military statistics go," wrote Powell, "but a tragedy for each family."

On Feb. 28, the day the war ended, Bush celebrated the victory. "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all," the President exulted, speaking to a group at the White House. [For more details, see Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege](#).]

So as not to put a damper on the post-war happy feelings, the U.S. news media decided not to show many of the grisliest photos, such as charred Iraqi soldiers ghoulishly still seated in their burned-out trucks where they had been incinerated while trying to flee. By that point, U.S. journalists knew it wasn't smart for their careers to present a reality that didn't make the war look good.

Enduring Legacy

Though Reagan's creation of a domestic propaganda bureaucracy began more than three decades ago and Bush's vanquishing of the Vietnam Syndrome was more than two decades ago the legacy of those actions continue to reverberate today in how the perceptions of the American people are now routinely managed. That was true during last decade's Iraq War and this decade's conflicts in Libya, Syria and Ukraine as well as the economic sanctions against Iran and Russia.

Indeed, while the older generation that pioneered these domestic propaganda techniques has passed from the scene, many of their protégés are still around

along with some of the same organizations. The National Endowment for Democracy, which was formed in 1983 at the urging of CIA Director Casey and under the supervision of Walter Raymond's NSC operation, is still run by the same neocon, Carl Gershman, and has an even bigger budget, now exceeding \$100 million a year.

Gershman and his NED played important behind-the-scenes roles in instigating the Ukraine crisis by financing activists, journalists and other operatives who supported the coup against elected President Yanukovich. The NED-backed Freedom House also beat the propaganda drums. [See Consortiumnews.com's "A Shadow Foreign Policy."]

Two other Reagan-era veterans, Elliott Abrams and Robert Kagan, have both provided important intellectual support for continuing U.S. interventionism around the world. Earlier this year, Kagan's article for The New Republic, entitled "Superpowers Don't Get to Retire," touched such a raw nerve with President Obama that he hosted Kagan at a White House lunch and crafted the presidential commencement speech at West Point to deflect some of Kagan's criticism of Obama's hesitancy to use military force.

A New York Times article about Kagan's influence over Obama reported that Kagan's wife, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, apparently had a hand in crafting the attack on her ostensible boss, President Obama.

According to the Times article, the husband-and-wife team share both a common world view and professional ambitions, Nuland editing Kagan's articles and Kagan "not permitted to use any official information he overhears or picks up around the house" a suggestion that Kagan's thinking at least may be informed by foreign policy secrets passed on by his wife.

Though Nuland wouldn't comment specifically on Kagan's attack on President Obama, she indicated that she holds similar views. "But suffice to say," Nuland said, "that nothing goes out of the house that I don't think is worthy of his talents. Let's put it that way."

Misguided Media

In the three decades since Reagan's propaganda machine was launched, the American press corps also has fallen more and more into line with an aggressive U.S. government's foreign policy strategies. Those of us in the mainstream media who resisted the propaganda pressures mostly saw our careers suffer while those who played along moved steadily up the ranks into positions of more money and more status.

Even after the Iraq War debacle when nearly the entire mainstream media went with the pro-invasion flow, there was almost no accountability for that historic

journalistic failure. Indeed, the neocon influence at major newspapers, such as the Washington Post and the New York Times, only has solidified since.

Today's coverage of the Syrian civil war or the Ukraine crisis is so firmly in line with the State Department's propaganda "themes" that it would put smiles on the faces of William Casey and Walter Raymond if they were around today to see how seamlessly the "perception management" now works. There's no need any more to send out "public diplomacy" teams to bully editors and news executives. Everyone is already onboard.

Rupert Murdoch's media empire is bigger than ever, but his neocon messaging barely stands out as distinctive, given how the neocons also have gained control of the editorial and foreign-reporting sections of the Washington Post, the New York Times and virtually every other major news outlet. For instance, the demonizing of Russian President Putin is now so total that no honest person could look at those articles and see anything approaching objective or evenhanded journalism. Yet, no one loses a job over this lack of professionalism.

The Reagan administration's dreams of harnessing private foundations and non-governmental organizations have also come true. The Orwellian circle has been completed with many American "anti-war" groups advocating for "humanitarian" wars in Syria and other countries targeted by U.S. propaganda. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Selling 'Peace Groups' on US-Led Wars."](#)]

Much as Reagan's "public diplomacy" apparatus once sent around "defectors" to lambaste Nicaragua's Sandinistas by citing hyped-up human rights violations now the work is done by NGOs with barely perceptible threads back to the U.S. government. Just as Freedom House had "credibility" in the 1980s because of its earlier reputation as a human rights group, now other groups carrying the "human rights" tag, such as Human Rights Watch, are in the forefront of urging U.S. military interventions based on murky or propagandistic claims. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["The Collapsing Syria-Sarin Case."](#)]

At this advanced stage of America's quiet surrender to "perception management," it is even hard to envision how one could retrace the many steps that would lead back to the concept of a democratic Republic based on an informed electorate. Many on the American Right remain entranced by the old propaganda theme about the "liberal media" and still embrace Reagan as their beloved icon. Meanwhile, many liberals can't break away from their own wistful trust in the New York Times and their empty hope that the media really is "liberal."

To confront the hard truth is not easy. Indeed, in this case, it can cause despair because there are so few voices to trust and they are easily drowned out

by floods of disinformation that can come from any angle right, left or center. Yet, for the American democratic Republic to reset its goal toward an informed electorate, there is no option other than to build institutions that are determinedly committed to the truth.

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](#)). 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](#).

The Future the US Budget Foretells

The key drafters of the U.S. Constitution may have had dreams of a government to "promote the general Welfare" but that goal has long since been lost to factionalism and special interests, a reality that is growing worse as money increasingly buys American politics, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

I can make high-probability predictions for 2015 and the near-beyond without the benefit of a crystal ball, tarot cards or tea leaves. The only thing that I need is a list of items from the new [2015 U.S. federal budget](#). Here are some of my forecasts and the budget items that make them so highly probable:

—There will be more deadly truck-related accidents than necessary on the nation's highways in 2015. That means more deaths, injuries, highway delays, stress and frustration. How do I know? Because the 2015 budget rolls back the safety requirement that truckers need to get more rest between driving assignments.

The regulation that was rolled back was itself barely adequate. It restricted drivers to a 70-hour week with mandated rest times between long periods behind the wheel. Nonetheless, despite obviously being in the public interest, this regulation could not survive the pressure of the lobbies representing the trucking industry and its corporate customers. Now we are back to truckers working 85-hour weeks with hardly any mandated rest at all.

—Either in 2015 or soon thereafter there will be another major banking crisis requiring the outlay of enormous sums of public money to avert economic

meltdown. How do I know? Because the 2015 federal budget rolls back the requirement, put in place after the last financial crisis, that forced the trading of derivatives to be done by corporate entities separated from the banks and not covered by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company.

In other words, if the banks wanted to devise unreasonably risky investment strategies for their more gullible customers, they had to insulate these strategies from their main banking operations that are crucial to the national economy. In addition the government was not required to insure such undue risks through the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Although obviously in the public interest, these regulations could not survive the pressure coming from the banking lobbies and so, once more, we all must be prepared to pay the price of this version of insufficiently regulated capitalism.

–The political influence of the nation’s wealthiest individuals will increase by a factor of ten in 2015, making the United States more of a plutocracy and less of a democracy than at any time since the 1920s. How do I know? Because the new federal budget emasculates what little was left of the 2002 McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act by increasing tenfold the amount of money individuals can give to political parties.

This is the result of conservatives’ demanding that political campaigns be underwritten wholly by private funds. Common sense tells us that such an arrangement can only confirm political power in the hands of those who are already economically dominant. By the way, most countries claiming to be democracies regulate against just this dominance of private money because it is recognized as politically corrupting.

–Environmental protection will deteriorate in 2015. If you live in a rural area where there are large farms, your water supply will become more suspect. How do I know all this? Because the 2015 federal budget slashes funding for the Environmental Protection Agency by \$60 million and forbids the same agency from applying the Clean Water Act to farm ponds and irrigation ditches. In the public interest? Of course not. However this move pleases agribusiness concerns and other industries.

–Israel, the economically developed nation that has violated just about every human rights regulation listed under international law, and also has repeatedly broken U.S. law forbidding the use of U.S.-supplied weapons for offensive actions against civilian populations, will continue to be both economically and militarily subsidized by the American taxpayer in 2015. How do I know this? Because the 2015 federal budget follows in the footsteps of so many past budgets by setting aside huge sums of money – in the present case \$3.1 billion in total aid – for the Zionist state. Of that aid package, \$619.8 million is military

related.

I could not get exact gross figures for how much money the federal government gives back per year to U.S. states for various programs, but certainly Israel gets more of your federal tax dollar than any single state does, and maybe more than all 50 states put together.

On the same topic of foreign aid to undeserving governments, the 2015 budget will help insure the survival of the brutal military dictatorship in Egypt. That bunch of gangsters will be getting \$1.3 billion in military aid.

These dubious expenditures are also not in the U.S. public interest for they will undermine democracy in Egypt and uphold dictatorship. In the case of Israel the money will help uphold racist authoritarianism, ethnic cleansing and religious bigotry. All of which (including the aid to Egypt) has been successfully encouraged by the financial power of the Zionist lobby.

Boehner's Bipartisanship

According to House Speaker John Boehner, the 2015 federal budget is a product of bipartisan compromise: "Understand all these provisions were worked out in a bipartisan, bi-cameral fashion."

However, this can hardly be the whole story. Boehner's statement implies that there were only Republicans and Democrats in the proverbial back room where the budget was worked out and that everyone was practicing sweet reason so as to come to a compromise that benefits the nation.

In truth, looking over the shoulders of those representing both parties were numerous lobbyists who had given a lot of money to all these politicians and now wanted something back for their investment. As a result, we as a nation, as a community, were thoroughly outbid by the trucking industry, the bankers, agribusiness, and a good number of conservative ideologues who want the right to gut the federal government (particularly the Environmental Protection Agency and the Internal Revenue Service) while monopolizing funding of our two major political parties. They want to do this so that, among other things, they don't have worry about regulations or pay even a reasonable amount of taxes.

The ultimate conclusion we can draw from this "bipartisan" process is that there is no sense of national interest, and damn little sense of community, in the American political system. Both concepts have been superseded by the particular parochial goals and sense of solidarity of groups and subgroups with the deep pockets necessary to buy legislators and legislation.

This is what happens when democracy allows itself to be captured by an

increasingly unregulated capitalist ethic – an erosion of any politically based sense of a need to work for the common good.

The really depressing part is that for most of our national history it has not been very different. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, President James Polk, himself a man of questionable integrity, observed, “There is more selfishness and less principle among members of Congress than I had any conception of, before I became President of the United States.” Well, the problem persists, and given our political way of doing things, it may never be fully overcome.

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

New Pressure to Stop Iran Nuke Accord

The economic pain, being inflicted on Iran and Russia by the Saudi-induced oil-price drop, has fueled a new surge in Official Washington’s “tough-guy-ism” and thus may hurt chances for successful negotiations, especially an agreement to constrain Iran’s nuclear program, as Gareth Porter reports.

By Gareth Porter

Everyone following the negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program and the lifting of economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic agrees that the Obama administration would like to have an agreement with Iran. It would be in line with the real interests of the United States to be able to cooperate openly with Iran against the common enemy of Sunni terrorists of the Islamic State (also called ISIS or ISIL). And it would be the one major accomplishment in foreign affairs that Obama could cite in his two terms in office.

But the evidence suggests that the administration won’t make the compromises with Iran necessary to get a comprehensive agreement. On one hand, the political and legal system of the United States has been so thoroughly reshaped over more than two decades by Israeli interests that the hoops Obama would have to jump through to lift sanctions against Iran would be far more politically demanding than what he had to do to lift sanctions against Cuba.

And on the other hand, despite its differences with Benjamin Netanyahu over the negotiations, the administration actually believes in the false narrative of covert Iranian nuclear weapons program and “nuclear deception” that Israel has

long promoted. As the lead negotiator for the United States with Iran, Wendy Sherman (the protégé of the hardline anti-Iran and pro-Israeli Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's choice to be Undersecretary of State) told a Congressional committee in October 2013, she didn't trust Iran, because, "we know deception is part of the DNA."

But even more important, the evidence indicates that the administration feels that it has no incentives to reach an agreement with Iran, because it is getting most of what it wants already under the status quo.

Sometimes it is what is not asserted more than what is said that provides a crucial insight into official thinking. Secretary of State John Kerry said in explaining the extension of the negotiations, "We would be fools to walk away from a situation where the breakout time has already expanded rather than narrowed, and where the world is safer because this program."

He was referring, of course, to the Joint Program of Action signed by the P5+1 and Iran in November 2013, which was supposed to provide a temporary bridge to the comprehensive agreement to follow.

In a sense, Kerry was merely stating the obvious. He did not add, however, that without achieving a comprehensive agreement, the temporary gains would all be lost. That omission raised the obvious question whether the administration had begun to hope that it could use the JPOA as a device to keep the negotiations going until Iran finally had to go along with U.S. terms.

The answer appears to be that the administration assumes that Iran will ultimately be forced to make the additional concessions that Washington has been demanding or that the talks will continue for another two years.

Politico's report on the decision to extend the talks elaborated on the administration's negotiating calculus. Administration officials, it said, "strongly dispute the idea that Kerry is wasting his time or that the extension amounts to a disappointment." The reason, they explained, was that Iran's nuclear program "is frozen in place" and "its growth capped by a November 2013 agreement that provided limited relief from international sanctions."

The officials further argued that time was on the side of the US negotiators "because continued economic sanctions are grinding away at Iran's economy."

The strategy suggested by that outline was clearly one of playing out the negotiations for as long as possible in the belief that Iran would ultimately be forced to accept the U.S. demands on enrichment and abandon its own demands on the lifting of sanctions.

A similar strategy was suggested in a column the following day by Washington Post columnist David Ignatius, well-known for reflecting the thinking high-ranking national security officials to whom he has long had unparalleled access. Mirroring the view of the unnamed administration officials quoted by Politico, Ignatius said the economic pressure on Iran “seems to be working in the West’s favor,” even though Iranian negotiators did not yet have the freedom to accept U.S. terms.

He went further, however, likening the situation in the talks with Iran to a labor negotiation in which both labor and management find the option of breaking off the talks too costly, so they continue the negotiations “without a contract.” Each side, Ignatius wrote, “for different reasons, seems to agree that for now, ‘no deal is better than a bad deal’,” as long as they “keep talking.”

Kerry made a special point in his press availability of the fact that the United States was holding on to its ultimate card the entire sanctions regime until Iran agreed to U.S. terms. “We will remove sanctions as the agreement is reached,” he said. Kerry was thus emphasizing what the U.S. views as the central fact of the negotiations: The United States can hold on to the gains from the JPOA while at the same time maintaining its bargaining leverage over Iran.

That posture depends on the perception that Iran cannot afford to walk away from the negotiating table. Six weeks before the Nov. 24 cut-off date, Robert Einhorn, who had been the Obama administration State Department’s non-proliferation official until January 2013 and who had detailed the administration’s thinking about the key negotiating issues earlier in 2014, observed that the rollover strategy was available as an alternative to reaching agreement, because Iran would go along with it.

“The option of simply throwing in the towel and calling it quits is not something that appeals to any of the parties,” Einhorn told the *Los Angeles Times*.

And even as early as December 2013, Gary Samore, who had been Obama’s primary adviser on the Iran nuclear issue until he left the administration in January 2013, predicted at the Manama, Bahrain “regional security summit” that the most likely outcome of another six months of negotiations would not be an actual comprehensive agreement but rather another “interim agreement.” Even more significantly, Samore suggested, that what he called a “process of rolling interim agreements” could last through the remainder of Obama’s term.

Samore is both Executive Director for Research at Harvard’s Belfer Center on Science and International Affairs and President of the organization United

Against Nuclear Iran, which takes positions on the Iran nuclear issue that reflect Israeli interests. So it is revealing that Samore was openly promoting an extension of the talks in October 2014, telling the *New York Times*, “[W]e would favor an extension because it keeps the nuclear program frozen.”

The remarks by Samore and Einhorn strongly suggest that the Obama administration has a strong incentive to maintain its hard line demand for a major reduction in Iran’s enrichment capabilities a demand to which Iran is unlikely to accede. And that was before the collapse of oil prices, putting even more pressure on the Iranian economy, which makes the administration even more confident about its diplomatic posture.

It is very difficult to imagine the administration rethinking its hard line unless and until Iran walks away from the negotiations at the end of the current extension and threatens to resume the development of its enrichment capabilities that it chose to freeze as a confidence-building measure.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian writing on U.S. national security policy. His latest book, *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, was published in February 2014. [This article originally appeared at Middle East Eye.]

Neocons Link Cuba Opening to Iran Deal

Exclusive: Neocons are hoping that by raising the political cost of President Obama’s diplomatic opening to Cuba, they can scare him away from reaching a final agreement with Iran over its nuclear program and thus keep alive their Mideast “regime change” agenda, as Andrés Cala explains.

By Andrés Cala

Official Washington’s influential neoconservatives are complaining about President Barack Obama’s move to lift the half-century-old embargo against Cuba, in part, because of what it might mean for his completing negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program.

Although some key neocons, such as Elliott Abrams, cut their teeth as U.S. government officials dealing with Cuba and other hemispheric issues Abrams as assistant secretary of state for Latin America in the 1980s their more recent focus has concentrated on supporting Middle Eastern policies that seek to derail any rapprochement with Iran, even if such a policy shift would further American

interests.

So, when Abrams denounced Obama's Cuba initiative, he did so in the context of how it might be viewed by Israel, Saudi Arabia and other enemies of Iran regarding a possible agreement to constrain but not eliminate Iran's nuclear program.

At the neocon Weekly Standard, Abrams wrote: "Imagine for a moment that you are a Saudi, Emirati, Jordanian, or Israeli. Your main national security worry these days is Iran, Iran's rise, its nuclear program, its troops fighting in Iraq and Syria, its growing influence from Yemen through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. Your main ally against Iran for the past decades has been the United States. Naturally you worry about American policy.

"And now, you turn on the TV and see the announcement about the change in American policy in Cuba. Re-establishment of diplomatic relations. Lots of changes in the embargo that will mean plenty more cash for the Castros. A change in the whole American official position vis-À-vis Cuba. As to real changes in the regime changes in its foreign or domestic policies none. Zero. Zip. So, you conclude that in the long struggle between the United States and the Castro regime since 1959, the Americans have finally blinked."

In other words, Washington's neocons see the opening to Cuba as part of a possible diplomatic shift by Obama toward pragmatic accommodations with longtime international rivals and enemies. For Israel and its de facto Sunni Arab allies in the Persian Gulf, that could mean they won't have Obama and the U.S. government around to help beat up on Shiite-ruled Iran.

But whether the Cuban initiative was a one-off move by Obama finally fulfilling a campaign promise to jettison an outdated Cold War policy or a way to test the waters before a more significant bid to reach out to Iran may well depend on the political and public reaction to his diplomatic opening to Cuba.

The typically cautious Obama rarely takes a risk without carefully gauging all likely reactions. Though the passing of the 2014 elections may have freed Obama up politically somewhat, he still seems to be moving at a measured pace mixing in tough-guy posturing toward adversaries such as Russian President Vladimir Putin with a hand extended to Cuban President Raul Castro.

Regarding the Cuban normalization, there was generally strong support among both businesses and the public for finally opening the door to Cuba, a Caribbean island of 11 million people with a gross domestic product of \$68 billion just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. But Cuba's significance has been more in its historical role as a Soviet beachhead in the 1960s rather than as a regional

powerhouse, either economically or politically.

American attitudes are a bit more complicated regarding Iran, which is a regional powerhouse with 77 million people and a GDP of \$369 billion, including huge oil resources. U.S. businesses are eager to enter the Iranian market and the American public seems largely ambivalent, with animosities over the 1979 hostage-taking of U.S. diplomats almost as faded as the anger over the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Crises Connected

Although the Cuban and Iranian negotiations have little in common aside from the decades of U.S. sanctions, they are linked in the minds of U.S. neocons and other hardliners who want to ratchet up the political costs for Obama on Cuba so he will flinch at the prospect of announcing another breakthrough with Iran.

Regarding Cuba, Obama's intentions were apparent even before he was elected, though he postponed action out of fear that an opening to Cuba could cost him the important swing state of Florida in 2012 and hurt Democratic chances there in 2014. But the talks were finally resolved with the most contentious issue the prisoner exchange, which involved returning two alleged American spies in exchange for three Cubans convicted of espionage.

Generally speaking, except for neocons like Abrams and other hardliners like Senators John McCain and Marco Rubio, the reaction to Obama's Cuban initiative has been mild to positive, possibly suggesting to Obama that any fallout from a nuclear agreement with Iran might be manageable as well.

According to sources knowledgeable about the Iran negotiations, a deal was within reach at the November deadline, but Obama balked, instead accepting an extension of talks until March 2015 to reach a framework agreement and until July 2015 to hammer out the technical implementation between Tehran and the so-called P5+1, the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany.

Though it's impossible to be sure, Obama likely concluded that the moment was not ripe at home for the Iran deal and possibly he didn't want to complicate the politically easier Cuba opening. He does seem to favor a methodical approach toward taking on challenges, first one, then another, rather than bunching them into a package.

Obama could also be looking at possible shifts in Israeli attitudes if elections in March 2015 bring a change in leadership. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been a major promoter of Israel's hostile stance toward Iran, putting Israel into an odd-couple alignment with Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states.

Both Israeli and Saudi officials have complained about the alleged threat from the Shiite crescent stretching from Tehran through Damascus to Beirut. And Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that the possibility Iran might eventually produce a nuclear bomb is an “existential threat” to Israel, though Israel has a large undeclared nuclear arsenal of its own.

However, U.S. intelligence agencies have assessed since 2007 that Iran stopped work on a nuclear weapon in 2003 and has not resumed that effort. Meanwhile, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini has renounced any interest in developing a nuclear weapon and insists that Iran’s nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Remaining Challenges

While Obama’s decision to postpone a final deal with Iran may have made sense in not complicating the Cuban timing, the delay does carry the risk that, in the coming months, political opposition might build both inside Iran and the United States, especially if the crisis with Russia over Ukraine deepens. Obama might feel compelled to act even tougher in global hot spots.

But the biggest threat to a possible opening to Iran could be a strengthening U.S. opposition from the well-connected neocons and from a Republican-controlled Congress. Along with Israel and the Sunni Arab countries, U.S. hardliners are pushing to expand the war in Syria to have the U.S. military join in attacking the Iranian-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Worsening tensions over Syria could complicate the political situation inside Iran where Ayatollah Khamenei, the ultimate decider on nuclear negotiations, has given reformist President Hassan Rouhani some room to negotiate but that space could close down if Iran sees its ally in Syria further threatened.

While the Iranian-nuclear negotiations are highly technical at this point, both sides also want to save face at home. From the Western perspective, the sticking point has been over how fast Iran could enrich uranium and thus have a theoretical “break-out” toward a bomb. From Iran’s viewpoint, the issues are basically its right to develop civilian nuclear technology under international controls and whether a deal will lead to significant sanction relief.

Iran wants any deal to translate into immediate and noticeable sanction relief, while the U.S. wants to condition a relaxing of sanctions on Iran’s compliance with an agreement. In other words, Obama wants to keep some sanctions in play in case Iran violates the agreement, while Iran doesn’t want to deliver its end of the deal up front, wary that the West might renege.

Both sides have signaled that the mistrust is not insurmountable as are the

technical specifics over the nuclear program. But there's also the politics of a deal that Obama must manage in Washington and Rouhani and Khamenei must manage in Tehran.

Despite the neocon/hawkish opposition to a deal in Washington, there are also factors working in favor of one, particularly how some U.S. strategic interests are aligning with those of Iran, especially regarding the fight against the Islamic State and the need to bolster the embattled Iraqi military. Iran has provided support for Iraqi and Kurdish forces resisting the Islamic State's Sunni jihadists, putting Iran on the same side of that conflict as the United States.

Obama's relations with Israel's Netanyahu and the Saudi monarchy are also strained, making the President unwilling to carry water for them in their rivalry with Shiite Iran. While Obama worries about the neocon influence in Washington, he also recognizes that he is unlikely to soften their opposition by simply giving in.

During Obama's six years in office, the neocons have managed to impose their agenda on issues such as the Afghan War's "surge" in 2009 and the Ukraine crisis in 2014 which undermined Obama's private cooperation with Putin on Syria and Iran.

If Obama finally decides to complete the deal with Iran, he can expect a difficult time with not just Republicans but even Democrats in Congress, where the Israel Lobby remains one of the most powerful and effective. Indeed, the likely congressional pressure would be toward increasing sanctions on Iran, not removing them.

Yet, at least for the time being, it appears that the anti-Iran hawks in Congress lack the votes to defeat a hypothetical Obama veto of any bill that would expand sanctions on Iran and thus kill negotiations while making Iran look like the more reasonable party in the talks.

Arguably, Obama's hand might be strengthened if Israel elects a new government less hostile to negotiations with Iran than Netanyahu's or if sustained low oil prices largely driven by Saudi Arabia's decision to maintain high production levels make Tehran even more desperate for a deal for sanctions relief.

Iran's economy is hurting badly and there is little hope for improvement until sanctions are lifted, especially on financial dealings which have limited Iran's ability to invest in industrial and other improvements. Without credit, insurance and spare parts for its oil industry, the Islamic Republic can endure, but not thrive.

U.S. business interests have long favored lifting sanctions on Iran. Western oil companies are gearing up to compete for up to \$100 billion in Iranian investments in the coming years. Other sectors are also eyeing Iran: consumer goods, banks, telecommunication, autos and construction.

Iran has a large middle class itching to buy Ipods and luxury items. Amid hopes for an end to the sanctions, corporate delegations from the U.S., Canada, France, Germany and elsewhere in the West have been flocking to Iran to pave the way for reentry as soon as practical.

Iran's Fallback Plan

Conversely, the failure to reach a deal could force Iran into its fallback plan, looking for new business partners including Russia, which is also facing Western sanctions over Ukraine.

Iran and Russia broadened economic ties only days after the failure to sign the nuclear deal in November. Though the two countries have historically had tense relations, they also have been stepping up their strategic cooperation around shared objectives in Syria and the Caucasus. But both now have something else in common, sanctions from the West.

Russia has been driving diplomacy in the Middle East more than any other country. Russia's offer to build two nuclear power plants for Iran and expand the existing one has enabled Iran to accept more limits on its enrichment of uranium. Under the proposed deal, Russia would supply the nuclear fuel.

Indeed, Russia and Iran are overcoming mutual mistrust and signing all types of agreements, from intelligence sharing to industrial cooperation, and the Kremlin continues to leverage its own disputes with the West using Iran as a bargaining chip. This rapprochement, which raises suspicions among Washington and its allies, would likely deepen without a nuclear deal.

The core strategic alliance of Iran and Russia is in Syria, where they are cooperating to defend Assad's regime. For Russia it's about strategic access to the Mediterranean and the ability to retain and even expand influence in the Middle East. For Iran, it's about preserving and even broadening its regional power struggle against its rivals Saudi Arabia and Israel.

From the view of some U.S. diplomats, Russian-Iranian cooperation could even unlock the stalemate in Syria by brokering Assad's departure and his replacement with a leader who could gain more support from the Sunni population. Iran and Russia have signaled they would accept Assad stepping down and the inclusion of Assad's opposition, as long as the status quo is otherwise maintained and the Alawites, Shiites, Christians and other minorities are protected.

But Obama has hesitated to play the Russian-Iranian card in Syria as he fends off pressure from Turkey, the Sunni Arabs and Israel to extend U.S. air strikes from the Islamic State to Assad's forces. The crisis in Ukraine has further complicated Obama's opportunity to use Russia as a diplomatic ally in resolving the Syrian civil war.

Yet, if he has the audacity to strike a deal on Iran's nuclear program and sanctions, Obama could make Iran a partner, even if not friend, in pursuing other conflict resolutions in the Middle East. But that also could present Obama with problems because of Saudi Arabia's economic clout in the West and Israel's political muscle on Capitol Hill.

Or Obama can judge a deal as too risky and close the diplomatic window with Iran. That, however, could lead to worsening Middle Eastern instability and feed a new Cold War with Russia. Iran has explicitly said it will bolster its ties with Russia and China if negotiations break off. It has also said it will not extend negotiations again.

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'Terrorism' Hysteria over Sony Hack

Some U.S. moviegoers say they are standing up to North Korean "cyber-terrorism" by going to see Sony's "The Interview," a comedy that makes light of assassinating real-life leader Kim Jong-un. But the furor over a retaliatory hack of Sony has the look of just the latest U.S. hysteria, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

The suspected hack by North Korea into the computer system of an American movie company has gotten a lot of people excited without a lot of thinking about the significance, or lack of it, of what has happened and without addressing some longstanding conceptual problems that have plagued discussions related to terrorism.

The problems persist even if we simplify matters by accepting the widespread assumption that the North Korean regime did in fact perpetrate the hack, an assumption that, based on public knowledge to date, is not necessarily correct.

It appears that the net effect of the electronic intrusion has been to delay release of a movie, not usually the stuff of which national security crises are made, or should be made. Some of those who are agitated about the incident refer to subsequent bellicose-sounding statements from the North Korean regime that, while denying responsibility for the computer intrusion, refer angrily to the same movie.

Some of what that regime is said to have said in the current instance regarding threats against the United States it did not really say. Besides, Pyongyang makes bellicose-sounding statements, including ones specifically directed at the United States, all the time.

Perhaps some of those alarmed about this latest incident believe that the successful hack demonstrates a capability as well as a willingness to inflict more substantial harm on Americans who go to see the movie that the North Korean regime does not want them to see.

The imagined scenario might involve something like North Korean hackers taking over the electronics of movie theaters in the United States and somehow manipulating the climate control system to have debilitating or lethal consequences on people in the audience. As ridiculous as such a scenario is, it is not improbable that such images are affecting the thinking of some Americans worrying about what North Korea might do, because this kind of fancifulness has roots in a larger tradition of American thinking about terrorism.

There has been fascination, dating at least back to the 1990s, with possible unconventional methods of terrorist attack, which is to say use of chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) means or anything having to do with cyber capabilities. And such hypothetical means do indeed make for fascinating scenarios.

The sheer sexiness of the subject fires the imagination. That fascination has led to grossly disproportionate attention in commentary and alarmism about terrorism using CBRN and cyber methods, disproportionate when compared to the ways terrorists actually have been harming people.

An example of this misplaced focus and how long it has been around was an article that President Obama's nominee for secretary of defense, Ashton Carter, wrote 16 years ago along with John Deutch, another former deputy secretary of defense, and Philip Zelikow, who supervised writing of the 9/11 commission report.

The danger the authors wanted to warn us about was that "terrorists may gain access to weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear devices, germ

dispensers, poison gas weapons, and even computer viruses." All of their imaginative hypothetical examples involved the use of either CBRN or cyber techniques. They argued that the big divide between, on one hand, terrorism we really ought to worry about more and would be "catastrophic," and on the other hand conventional terrorism which the authors assured us was already getting sufficient attention, was whether or not such unconventional techniques or weapons were used.

The 9/11 attacks, which had nothing whatever to do with either cyber methods or CBRN capabilities, demonstrated how mistaken that analysis was. Nothing terrorists have done in the years since then suggests that the analysis is any less misdirected. And yet, the fascination continues, as do mistaken attributions of newness to threats that fit the fascinating mold.

Thus, for example, David Rothkopf tells us this week that "we are at a critical juncture in the dawning days of the cyber era," that we need "to start writing a new playbook" on foreign policy because of cyber threats, and that in response to the Sony Pictures incident we ought to be talking about using not just cyberattacks but even military action against North Korea. Sen. John McCain, not to be outdone by anyone when it comes to talking about getting involved in wars, said the presumed North Korean hack of Sony was "the manifestation of a new form of warfare."

Another old terrorism-related issue that the Sony matter has raised concerns the official U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. President Barack Obama says he will review whether there is reason to put North Korea back on the list. Such a review would be appropriate insofar as it actually focuses on terrorism. The state sponsor designation has been one of the most abused listings the U.S. government promulgates, with most of the listings and delistings, under several different administrations, having little or nothing to do with terrorism.

Cuba's remaining on the list long after ceasing to be involved in anything that could be considered sponsorship of terrorism has been a glaring anomaly, although one that may be corrected in the course of implementing the President's initiative on Cuba. Iraq under Saddam Hussein was moved off and on the list for reasons other than any change in Iraq's terrorism-related behavior; it came off during the Reagan administration as part of the U.S. tilt toward Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, and it was put back on when Saddam invaded Kuwait.

North Korea perpetrated very nasty terrorism back in the 1980s but remained on the list for many years after it had stopped doing anything of the sort. When the George W. Bush administration removed it from the list six years ago the real reason had to do not with terrorism but with circumstances associated with the nuclear weapons issue.

Although the fascination with hypothetical cyber shenanigans as a terrorist tool, and the entrenchment of the term *cyberterrorism* in the language, provide an impetus for labeling the presumed North Korean action against Sony Pictures as terrorism, there surely is a case to be made for maintaining a clear distinction, in terminology as well as in responses, between actions that delay a movie's release and ones that have the more material effects commonly associated with terrorism.

Another reason for pause in applying the label of *terrorism* to what has occurred, and no doubt a reason the Obama administration is pausing before applying it, is to think about what the United States, or countries the United States calls allies, have done or might do with their own cyber capabilities overseas. If one action is to be called terrorism, then so must the other.

This gets to an asymmetry that has kept us Americans from fully coming to terms with how we and others use state-sanctioned violence for political purposes. The most common conceptions of terrorism mostly correspond to the legal U.S. definition that is used for another one of those official lists (the one for foreign terrorist organizations).

That definition refers to politically motivated violence conducted against noncombatants by either a nonstate organization or clandestine agents of a state. Most of the politically motivated violence that we, or our purported allies, practice (much of which affects noncombatants, sometimes in very bloody ways) is conducted openly as military operations. Others may not have that opportunity, either because of weakness in military capabilities or lack of recognition as a state, or both.

So we get to apply the label of *terrorism* to the other guy's politically motivated violence but don't have to apply it to our own, or perhaps to that of a putative ally. A distinction is made in semantics, even if not in morality or material effects. But if we apply the label to any hostile cyber operations in a foreign country and have conducted any such operations ourselves, we lose that convenient terminological asymmetry.

Of course, one could follow McCain's approach of simply calling everything war, but that leads to two other observations. One is that if we have conducted hostile cyber operations not in response to anything that could be called either terrorism or war but instead in response to something else (such as, say, a nuclear program we don't happen to like), then we would have to say we started a war. (And is that any better than initiating other forms of politically motivated violence?)

The other observation is that if we are in a state of war any time a hacker goes

after a movie he doesn't happen to like and affects its box office receipts, we are in worse trouble than any of us thought.

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