

The Scandal Hidden Behind Russia-gate

Exclusive: Official Washington has the Russia-gate scandal almost 180-degrees wrong; it is not about protecting democracy, but about pushing Americans into more wars, the true scandal that is being missed, writes Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

The Washington Post and New York Times editors are trying to relive the glory days of their youth by comparing Trump's firing of FBI chief James Comey to Richard Nixon's Saturday Night Massacre at the height of Watergate. Donald Trump, it seems, is a threat to democracy just as Tricky Dick was more than 40 years ago, so the only thing that can save us is a special prosecutor who will get to the bottom of Russia-gate once and for all.

But not only is this nonsense, it's pernicious nonsense that itself amounts to a cover-up. Here's how Russia-gate is not the same as Watergate and why, in fact, it's the opposite:

Difference No. 1: Watergate was about a real event, the June 17, 1972, break-in at the Democratic National Committee's offices at the Watergate Hotel in which five people were caught red-handed in the act. The fireworks began when the burglars turned out to be part of a special security operation known as the White House Plumbers.

This is why Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox ran into a buzz-saw in October 1973. After months of gumshoe field work, he had begun zeroing in on evidence linking the Plumbers with the Oval Office. This was a bridge too far from Nixon's point of view, and so he ordered him canned.

Cox was thus operating in the realm of hard, cold, tangible fact. But Russia-gate is different since the alleged crime that is at heart of the scandal – last summer's reported data break-in at the DNC – is so far based on purest speculation. No burglars have been apprehended, no links have been clearly established with the reputed masterminds in Moscow, while Wikileaks continues to insist that the email disclosure was not a hack by outside intelligence operatives at all, but a leak by a "disgusted" insider.

Since the FBI has never conducted an independent investigation – for as-yet-unexplained reasons, the DNC refused to grant it access to its servers despite multiple requests – the only evidence that a break-in even occurred comes from a private cyber-security firm, CrowdStrike Inc. of Irvine, California, that the DNC hired to look into the breach.

Since when do the cops rely on a private eye to look into a murder rather than performing an investigation of their own? CrowdStrike, moreover, turns out to be highly suspect. Not only is Dmitri Alperovich, its chief technical officer, a Russian émigré with a pronounced anti-Putin tilt, but he is also an associate of a virulently anti-Russian outfit known as the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank funded by the Saudis, the United Arab Emirates, the Ukrainian World Congress, the U.S. State Department and a variety of other individuals and groups that have an interest in isolating or discrediting Russia.

The Atlantic Council puts out a stream of anti-Kremlin articles and reports with scary headlines like “Distract Deceive Destroy: Putin at War in Syria” and “Six Immediate Steps to Stop Putin’s Aggression.”

Since the Atlantic Council is also a long-time supporter of Hillary Clinton, this means that the Clinton campaign relied on a friendly anti-Putin cyber-sleuth to tell it what everyone involved wanted to hear, i.e. that the Kremlin was at the bottom of it all. If this strikes you as fishy, it should.

CrowdStrike’s findings seemed weak in other respects as well. A few days after determining that Russian intelligence was responsible, Alperovich issued a memo praising the hackers to the skies. “Their tradecraft is superb, operational security second to none and the extensive usage of ‘living-off-the-land’ techniques enables them to easily bypass many security solutions they encounter,” he wrote. Since the hackers were brilliant, CrowdStrike had to be even more so to track them down and expose their perfidy for all to see.

But CrowdStrike then said it was able to pin it on the Russians because the hackers had made certain elementary mistakes, most notably uploading a document in a Russian-language format under the name “Felix Edmundovich,” an obvious reference to Felix E. Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka, as the Soviet political police were originally known. It was the equivalent of American intelligence agents uploading a Russian document under the name “J. Edgar.” Since this was obviously very careless of them, it raised an elementary question: how could the hackers be super-sophisticated yet at the same time guilty of an error that was unbearably dumb?

The skeptics promptly pounced. Referring to Russia’s two top intelligence agencies, a well-known cyber-security expert named Jeffrey Carr was unable to restrain his sarcasm: “OK. Raise your hand if you think that a GRU or FSB officer would add Iron Felix’s name to the metadata of a stolen document before he released it to the world while pretending to be a Romanian hacker. Someone clearly had a wicked sense of humor.”

Since scattering such false leads is child’s play for even a novice hacker, it

was left to John McAfee, founder of McAfee Associates and developer of the first commercial anti-virus software, to draw the ultimate conclusion. "If it looks like the Russians did it," he told TV interviewer Larry King, "then I can guarantee you: it was not the Russians."

None of this proves that the Russians didn't hack the DNC. All it proves is that evidence is lacking. If all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies agree that the Kremlin did it, it is worth bearing in mind that the "intelligence community" was equally unanimous in 2002 that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. If they were wrong then, why should anyone believe that they are right now in the absence of clear and unequivocal evidence? (On Monday, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper clarified that the repeated claim about the unanimous view of the 17 agencies was wrong; that the report, which he released on Jan. 6, was the work of hand-picked analysts from the CIA, the FBI and the National Security Agency.)

So, where Cox was dealing with a real live burglary, all we have today is smoke and mirrors.

Difference No. 2: Russia-gate is not about democracy but about neo-McCarthyism and war.

For all the self-serving hoopla and mythology surrounding Watergate, the scandal was ultimately about something important: the dirty tricks and lawless authoritarianism that were advancing smartly under the Nixon administration. But Russia-gate is not about democracy. Rather, it is about an inside-the-beltway battle over the direction of U.S.-Russian relations.

The battle is deadly serious. Since roughly 2008, Cold War II has expanded steadily to the point where it now extends along a 1,300-mile front from Estonia to the Crimea plus the Caucasus and major portions of the Middle East. It has intensified as well and would likely have reached a flashpoint if the hawkish Hillary Clinton had been elected.

But Trump's surprise victory threw a wrench into the works. This is not to say that Donald Trump is a latter-day Mahatma Gandhi out to bring peace and brotherhood to the world. To the contrary, he's a loud-mouthed ignoramus who can barely find Russia on the map. But amid all his confused mutterings about foreign policy, one thing that has come through loud and clear is his desire for a rapprochement with Russia.

Given the mounting war fever that has gripped Washington for the last ten years or so, this is nothing short of explosive. Once it became clear in the early morning hours of Nov. 9 that Trump was White House-bound, the pro-war

establishment therefore went into overdrive. Every effort was made to undermine the President-elect's legitimacy.

Evidence was dug up purporting to show that he had colluded with the Kremlin. A Democratic-funded memo by a British intelligence officer named Christopher Steele was produced claiming that Russian intelligence had a video of him cavorting with prostitutes in Moscow's Ritz Carlton.

But it's all so much hot air. Nothing of substance has turned up. A 1,700-word front-page exposé about Trump campaign aide Carter Page that The New York Times ran on April 20 was typical. A study in innuendo and unsubstantiated assertions, it said that the FBI became concerned when it learned that "a Russian spy" had tried to recruit him during a visit to Moscow in 2013. But then it disclosed that Page, an academic and energy entrepreneur, had no idea that the person was a spy and merely thought he was talking business with an ordinary diplomatic attaché with Russia's U.N. mission.

It's a mistake that any American businessman could make, whether in Moscow or in London or Tel Aviv. "It is unclear," the Times went on, "exactly what about Mr. Page's visit drew the FBI's interest: meetings he had during his three days in Moscow, intercepted communications of Russian officials speaking about him, or something else."

But one thing that apparently caused ears to prick up was a talk he gave at a Russian economics institute. The reason according to the Times is that it: "criticized American policy toward Russia in terms that echoed the position of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, declaring, 'Washington and other Western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption and regime change.' His remarks accorded with Mr. Trump's positive view of the Russian president, which had prompted speculation about what Mr. Trump saw in Mr. Putin – more commonly denounced in the United States as a ruthless, anti-Western autocrat."

In other words, Page drew official notice because he dared to differ with the orthodox view of Putin as a latter-day Lucifer. As a consequence, he now finds himself at the center of what the Times describes as "a wide-ranging investigation, now accompanied by two congressional inquiries, that has cast a shadow over the early months of the Trump administration." So, out of nothing (or at least very little) has grown something very, very large, an absurd pseudo-scandal that now has Democrats gobbling on about special prosecutors and impeachment.

But even though there's no clear "there" there, the Washington scandal machine has a way of feeding on itself regardless. As Consortium News' Robert Parry has

pointed out (see "The McCarthyism of Russia-gate," May 7), the Senate Intelligence Committee hit Page with a sweeping order on April 28 to turn over anything and everything having to do with his extensive list of Russian business, personal and casual contacts for the 18 months prior to Trump's Inauguration.

The order thus informs Page that he must turn over "[a] list of all meetings between you and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests which took place between June 16, 2015, and January 20, 2017 ... all meetings of which you are aware between any individual with the Trump campaign and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests ... [a]ll communications records, including electronic communications records such as e-mail or text messages, written correspondence, and phone records of communications ... to which you and any Russian official or representative of Russian business interests was a party," and so on and so forth.

Considering that Page lived in Russia for several years, the request is virtually impossible. It thus "amounts to a perjury trap," Parry notes, "because even if Page tried his best to supply all the personal, phone, and email contacts, he would be sure to miss something or someone, thus setting him up for prosecution for obstructing an investigation or lying to investigators."

It also amounts to a self-fueling scandal machine since if Page falls short in any respect, the result will be fuel for a dozen outraged Times and Washington Post editorials accusing the Trump team of covering up. If the investigation into Monical Lewinsky's little blue dress was a joke, this will be even worse, a scandal without end resting ultimately on thin air.

But to what end? The goal, simply, is to drive Trump out of office or, barring that, to force him to adopt a more warlike foreign policy. The effort has already borne fruit in the form of the April 6 Tomahawk missile strike at a Syrian government airbase that Trump launched less to punish Bashar al-Assad than to get the Democrats, the press, the neocons, and other members of the war camp off his back. The press reception was rapturous, and after labeling Trump a Kremlin stooge on a near-daily basis, Democrats like Chuck Schumer, Nancy Pelosi, and Dick Durbin responded by patting him fondly on the back.

The more such actions he launches, the more approving such paragons of democracy will become. With amazing accuracy, the Democrats have zeroed in on the one halfway positive thing Trump had to say during his campaign and made it their chief target.

Difference No. 3: Where Watergate was about blocking a cover-up, Russia-gate is about perpetuating one.

Hours after Comey received his termination notice, Ken Gude, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, published an article calling on the Justice Department to “appoint a special counsel to lead the investigation into links between the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia’s efforts to interfere with the election.”

This was very neutral, objective, and high-minded of him. But the question to ask in this instance is *cui bono* – who benefits? The answer lies in what the Center for American Progress is and whom it represents.

The answer is that CAP is a major Clinton stronghold. Its founder is John Podesta, who was Clinton’s campaign chairman and whose brother, Tony, is a registered Saudi lobbyist. Its president is Neera Tanden, a long-time Clinton friend and adviser.

Major funders include George Soros and the United Arab Emirates, which, like Saudis, has long pushed for the U.S. to adopt a more militant posture vis-à-vis Iran, Syria’s Assad government, and Russia, which is allied with both. This means more sabre-rattling towards Moscow, more weapons and support for Saudi-funded jihadis in Syria, and more U.S. backup for the Saudi-UAE war against Yemen, in which more than 10,000 people have died, according to U.N. estimates, and much of the population is on the brink of mass starvation.

This is the real scandal that Russia-gate is designed to cover up. Like any country, Russia wants to steer U.S. foreign policy in a direction favorable to interests. But it’s a very small player in Washington compared to giants like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. These are nations that have given millions to the Clinton Foundation, to the “William J. Clinton Presidential Center and Park” in Little Rock, Arkansas (recipient of a \$10-million gift from the Saudi royal family), universities like Harvard and Georgetown, and a slew of think tanks, not just CAP and the Atlantic Council, but the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Brookings, the recipient of a \$14.8-million contribution from Qatar.

The oil monarchies have thus used their petro-wealth to create a pro-war consensus in Washington that is nearly 100-percent complete. Needless to say, this will not benefit the mass of ordinary Americans, the people who will have to fight and die in such conflicts and whose taxes will pay for them. Instead, it will benefit the oil companies and arms manufacturers with whom the oil monarchies are closely allied, not to mention hawkish politicians hoping to use war fever to propel their careers to ever greater heights.

They will benefit because they have sold U.S. foreign policy to the highest

bidder. This is a scandal of the first order. But rather than exposing it, Russia-gate is all about covering it up.

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Complexities of a ‘Post-Truth’ Era

The mainstream U.S. media claims a monopoly on determining truth, despite a very spotty record of getting it right and a blindness to the reality that there are usually two sides to a story, as Gilbert Doctorow explains.

By Gilbert Doctorow

We’re told that we’re living in a post-truth (or post-factual) era, a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, a culture that eschews a foundation of solid facts. Indeed, it is said that in this post-truth time, facts have become “secondary” if not entirely irrelevant. But who gets stuck with this “post-truth” label – and it is typically used as an insult – is not so simple.

In 2016, “post-truth” was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries’ Word of the Year, due to its prevalence in the context of the Brexit referendum and the U.S. presidential election, but it’s clearly true that “post-truth” is not entirely a new phenomenon. Political lies and fabrications are as old as time and in recent years have come from Democrats as well as Republicans.

However, this Word of the Year has developed a distinctly partisan and derogatory usage in the United States. It relates not just to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, but specifically to the Republican nominee in that election who now sits in the Oval Office. That is to say, the word has been *instrumentalized*, another fashionable concept of our day, to attack Donald J. Trump, whom the word’s framers consider to be the embodiment of post-truth.

This is not to suggest that Trump’s character weakness for self-serving tall stories does not justify severe criticism. It was not for nothing that Rex Tillerson, in his prepared statement at the opening of his Senate confirmation hearings to become Secretary of State, chose to stress that truth was something he would always make a guiding principle in his State Department operations. From his training as an engineer, he promised that he would follow the facts wherever they led him.

(It is very sad to note that once in office, Tillerson's loyalty to his boss outweighed his personal convictions and professional methodology so that he has become a willing mouthpiece for dubious claims against Syria over an alleged but unproven chemical attack by the Assad forces in Idlib province. It was also curious that the mainstream U.S. media, which doesn't trust a word coming out of Trump's mouth or his Twitter finger, suddenly believed his every word justifying his retaliatory missile strike on Syria – and anyone who doubted Trump was banished to the post-truth woodshed.)

Also, for anyone observing the ongoing Democratic-led witch hunt in Washington over suspected collusion between Trump advisers and the Russians to throw the election his way, or otherwise to undermine U.S. democracy, it is patently clear that the concept of "post-truth" is fully descriptive of what is being practiced by Trump's opponents, too.

We have smears, slurs, allegations unsupported by facts, and "fishing expeditions" to find something – anything – that fits previously prepared indictments and prepares the way for Trump's possible impeachment, aided and abetted by the mainstream media which regards itself as the definer and defender of Truth. No factual counter-argument by the few experts and politicians daring to stand up to the mob on Capitol Hill counts for anything.

Complexities of Truth

But it would be a mistake to allow our understanding of "post-truth" to be limited strictly by the vagaries of partisan politics, or to blame it on the character defects of this or that public personality. In truth, truth can have many forms.

There is, for instance, scientific, scholarly or empirical truth based on properly established and observable facts, i.e., things that can be objectively measured. There is also religious truth, which is faith-based and which is still a major influence on American society. Artistic truth, to take another example, is highly personal and subjective; facts as building blocks play little or no role.

In the political/journalistic world, facts are important, but there can be varying interpretations of those facts, i.e., divergent narratives explaining how certain facts add up or don't add up. While there can't be "alternative facts" – a widely derided phrase offered up by one Trump defender – there can be "alternative narratives" or, in that sense, "alternative truths." People can see the same facts and interpret them very differently based on their life experiences, or as editors used to tell young reporters, "there are always two sides to a story."

Often, the concept of “post-truth” – as applied in the political/journalistic world these days – depends on which side of the divide you’re on regarding populist politics. The elites like to believe that they have a monopoly on “truth” because of their superior education or status. They resent the idea that non-elites believe they can understand reality as well as or even better than the elites.

Much of the battle over “post-truth” boils down to the elites’ anger over their monopoly on defining political/journalist truth being challenged. But the “truth” of these elites often contradicts the realities experienced by the non-elites, many of whom have developed a strong anti-intellectual current and are ready to reject what the elites are presenting to the public via the media every day.

Business ‘Truth’

But there is another dimension to the current ascendancy of “post-truth” – as it relates to Trump – that I have experienced in working more than 25 years in international business. “Post-truth” behavior has, for decades, been enshrined in Anglo-Saxon business culture. It has only now spilled over into politics because a maverick business mogul has unexpectedly risen to the apex of American politics. He also has brought with him an entourage of fellow moguls, as described in an April 22 article in *The New York Times* entitled “Trump Reaches Beyond West Wing for Counsel.”

And, I’m not just talking about the pitchman’s tendency to present his product as always “beautiful” and “great.” There is a tension inside the business world between mid-level executives who justify their judgments based on facts and figures and senior executives who often rely on “gut instincts” but then want some expert to verify what they want to do.

I spent about two-thirds of my business career in that middle-management territory where the strategic business planning cycle of marketing departments typically draws its basic narrative from outside fact-based reference materials like the Economist Intelligence Unit. Moreover, big corporate investment projects presented to senior management by middle managers in Power Point are preferably defended on the basis of hard historic numbers, not back-of-the-envelope guesses.

But the one-third of my business career spent as an outside consultant to the Boards of Directors of 20 or more major corporations – ranging from fast-moving consumer goods to food and beverages to parcel delivery and even to hi-tech – showed that something very different was going on. The top managers operate in a different value system, where highest appreciation is given not to facts but to

a less rigid set of judgments based on intuition and experience. That is particularly true when the subject is not routine business but high-profile projects entailing new investment or business activity.

In my experience as outside consultant time and again it emerged that the main purpose of such assignments was to serve as a support to top management for ideas they arrived at by gut instinct rather than fact. The challenge was to overcome resistance to their initiatives from petty-fogging, fact-wielding middle management by reference to the supposedly greater expertise of the consultant, who might be allowed to argue with smoke and mirrors that would never pass if put up by employees.

If I had any doubts about my suspicions regarding the rating of intuition as opposed to facts in top management circles, they were dispelled by a psychological report I received back during my own vetting for a country manager position at the world's biggest distiller back in 1998. The report's preparer was a Ph.D. in psychology and surely had a clear-eyed understanding of corporate culture.

His lengthy analysis of my strengths and areas for development, as weaknesses are termed, boiled down to one sentence: "Gilbert tends to be rational rather than intuitive." The positives – intellect, strategic grasp, tenacious worker, flexibility in ambiguous environments, experience and knowledge of local conditions – were fine, but the nagging drawback was intuition, otherwise called gut feeling.

I got the job, but my understanding of which levers worked in the company and which didn't for decisions surrounding major new projects was changed forever. With intuition one cannot argue. As the old Russian folk saying has it: I am the boss and you are an idiot; you are the boss and I am an idiot.

In big business, as I saw from the inside, very often blunders which occur due to intuition-based rather than fact-based decision making can be very expensive but are rarely ruinous. Very large companies are usually able to recoup these losses from their routine, profitable operations, meaning from the paying public, using market strength. The companies then tweak the new activities over time and bring them into profit.

The open question now, in the chaotic first months of the Trump administration, is how this approach to "post-truth" management will work out for the U.S. federal government – for Trump and his team on one side and for those who are trying to bring him down on the other.

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Respecting a Courageous American

In a dreary era when politicians play predictable roles and avoid courageous stands, it is worth remembering former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, now 89, who dared challenge U.S. foreign policies, says Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

A new documentary about former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark explores his lifetime commitment to human rights and his deep and abiding belief in democratic principles.

As President Lyndon Johnson's chief law enforcement official, Clark was in charge of enforcing the court order that protected the historic Poor People's March, led by Martin Luther King Jr., from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Clark also oversaw the drafting and passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Civil Rights Act of 1968.

After his stint as Attorney General, Clark provided legal support for the late antiwar activist, Father Philip Berrigan, and Native American political prisoner, Leonard Peltier. An unrelenting and outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy, Clark, now 89, has called for an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as a ban on depleted uranium weapons. Clark also risked his life to travel to Iraq and defend Saddam Hussein after his capture.

On May 2, I spoke with Joseph Stillman, the writer and director of *Citizen Clark: A Life of Principle*.

DB: How did this all begin? Where did this start?

JS: Well, I did a film about a returning Iraq veteran some 12 years ago, and Ramsey was in the film. And an organization asked me to show that film and they wanted to honor Ramsey, because he was in it. And they asked me to bring him with me to that screening and I did. And afterwards someone in the audience asked Ramsey what he thought [that] the possibility of a nuclear war in this country might be. And he thought about it for a second, and gave this very elaborate and incredible sort of description of how such a horrific event, like that, would play out.

And then afterwards that same person that asked the question in the Q & A at the end of the screening said, "It sounds to me like you're not too optimistic about

the future of the United States.” To which Ramsey replied, “Quite the contrary, I’m an optimist. Because without optimism there is no hope. But I’m not just talking about the ramifications for the United States. I’m talking about the survival of mankind, on the face of this planet, as we know it.”

And that night as we drove back to New York City from the Catskills we had a long discussion about that. And I thought, “What an incredible man with such an important perspective of not only the past and the present, but the future. What a great film it might make if somebody told his story.” And so I asked him, had anybody ever done a film on his life. And he said “No, why would anyone want to?” Typical Ramsey response.

And then, eventually, I asked him if I could do it and he sort of hemmed and hawed and then he said “Yes.” I think he said yes because his late wife is from my home town in Corpus Christi, Texas. He lived a couple of houses down from my grandparents. So, I think that’s the reason he said yes.

But Ramsey’s story is a really remarkable tale of a man that grew up in privilege, that could have written his own ticket, and instead chose to fight for the oppressed, and, really, a lot of groups, organizations and individuals who are unrepresented, and who needed a voice and he shed light on their plight.

DB: Well, he took the constitution seriously, and the right for everybody to have a vigorous defense in this world. Talk a little bit about ... I mean this is the son of a supreme court justice [Tom C. Clark], the former highest law enforcement official in the United States, the attorney general, who all of a sudden does, it seems, it’s like a 180 [degree flip]. You want to talk about his early career and how that evolved?

JS: Sure. Well, when you’re the highest law enforcement officer of the land, you traditionally, or in the past anyway, you take a position with a prestigious law firm, you write expensive coffee table books, you get tens of thousands of dollars for speeches. Well, Ramsey, when he got out of public service, the first thing he did was go to North Vietnam, at the height of the war, which was very controversial at the time. He wrote a book called *Crime in America*, about the connection between poverty and crime, and solutions for that.

And then he chose instead [...] to go into various interventions throughout the world, to see what was actually going on, to report back about the real things that were happening in these various wars that our country got involved with.

[...] Martin Sheen, I think, said it best, in Los Angeles last year at another screening of this film, when he said that Ramsey Clark was the conscience of our country when we needed one: an individual who said the things that everyone knew

was true but nobody wanted to be on record as saying. And that was Ramsey, a fearless advocate of the truth, and what was happening within our democratic process.

DB: [...] Talk about some of the major cases, controversial cases, he's taken on, set that up for us.

JS: Well, there's quite a few. I think he was involved in about 32 U.S. interventions across the world. And he offered ... just as an example, he offered to take the place of the Iran hostages [in 1980], very interesting story there. President Carter calls him up and says "Can you go and talk to the Ayatollah?" who Ramsey had a relationship with for twenty-something years. He said "Sure." He flies to Barcelona, then to Moscow. He's getting ready to go to Tehran the next day, and that night there was a failed attempt to rescue the hostages, by two helicopters, I think, that get caught in a sand storm and Ramsey's trip gets canceled, as a result of that.

But, you know, Ramsey was always in the midst of numerous interventions, because he knew a lot of the people. He had a relationship with Saddam. He represented Saddam Hussein. He was one of three international lawyers on his team. Six Iraqi lawyers were killed in the course of that trial. Ramsey was getting threatened every day. It was a very tense and difficult situation. And what's in it for someone like Ramsey, other than if you're going to talk about a country being a democracy, then you have to represent everybody, not just the people that can afford to be represented, or that you want to. So Ramsey was an individual of principle.

DB: And just to say a little bit more about the courage there, because he's...I'm sure he didn't have a lot of friends in the U.S. Marines or the U.S. government when he's there getting death threat[s], and putting his life on the line. So, he's not counting on the kind of protection, let's say, U.S. journalists get when they look like soldiers. He has always been out there in his suit and tie.

JS: Yep, absolutely. I think that a really good example is the first night of the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965, Ramsey was assigned to protect the marchers by LBJ [President Lyndon Baines Johnson]. And the very first night, it was getting late, eleven o'clock or so, everybody was getting ready to go to bed, Ramsey had known Martin Luther King for a while. Martin Luther King turns to Ramsey and says, "You know Ramsey, never be afraid because fear will corrupt your soul. And you can never do what's right."

And I think that has been one of the themes of this film. There are many, but Ramsey was a fearless individual, just like the Kennedys, and Martin Luther King, and others who [knew] you cannot seek justice or truth if you are not

fearless. And I think, actually, the message of this film, in many ways, is to empower all of us as citizens of, not only our communities and our country and the world, but we have to, all of us have to be fearless, if we expect to protect the rights of others and really to do the right thing for all of humanity. I think that's what Ramsey has done all his life. And I'm so honored to be able to tell, in a small way, his incredible story.

DB: What were a couple of the most surprising things that perhaps you weren't suspecting?

JS: About Ramsey?

DB: Yeah.

JS: Well, you know [...] when I first asked Ramsey if I could do this film, he reluctantly agreed to let me do it. And then he added one other caveat. He said, "You know, my life has been complicated." Well, if there was ever an understatement in the world, that was it. But I found so many instances where the situations that he found himself in were amazing.

Saddam Hussein, as an example, one day – [Hussein] was very curious about LBJ because of the Great Society programs, and the things that LBJ did for his country. And he said "Tell me about LBJ."

LBJ was the type of person that would walk into your office and start telling you a story about Mexican-American kids coming to school, when he was a school teacher, having no shoes, having bloody feet. And LBJ would begin to cry. This is a story that Ramsey told me about his experience with LBJ.

So when Saddam wanted to know about LBJ, Ramsey related this story about poor kids without shoes, and LBJ crying and Saddam thinks about it for a second and he says, "You know, that doesn't seem quite right, because how can he be concerned about kids with bloody shoes on their feet, when he's dropping bombs that are killing 2 million people in Vietnam?"

And so there were instances, many, many instances of that little story between Ramsey and Saddam that tell you a lot about the individuals that Ramsey came in contact with, or Ramsey knew. And I think that they all respected Ramsey because he was a person that always told the truth. You weren't going to get some kind of political smart kind of response to something. You were going to get an honest reflection of what Ramsey thought. And that was one of the reasons why I think LBJ trusted Ramsey because he always knew that he could get an answer that was forthright and not looking at it from a political standpoint of any sort, because Ramsey was apolitical.

DB: Apolitical. Like...but he's been called a communist, a traitor. People suggested that he be hung from the rafters.

JS: Sure.

DB: So, explain that. One would think that he's an extreme leftist.

JS: Yeah. I think that...I would get, in the course of the five years of this film [...] I would be talking to people and they would say "How can you...how could Ramsey justify representing someone like Saddam?" as an example. And Ramsey never said that Saddam was a good guy or a bad guy, or anything. He just said "You know, if you're a leader with three warring factions that are trying to destroy each other, you have to do whatever you have to do in order to keep your country together. And that doesn't mean that it's a good thing. It just means that that's what this individual had to do."

And Ramsey was always looking at the sort of geo-political kind of ramifications of various world leaders and events, because he was very much a student of history. [...] He said, "You have to go back, this started 900 years ago." So he was a person that had a very deep and committed insight into the various histories of those countries and what brought them to a certain point. And I think ultimately the one thing that Ramsey has been consistent with all his life is the fact of the influence of wealth, special interests, big money on government.

And I think that that's a universal theme with everything that Ramsey has done. He's always looked at policies that have happened in this country and said "Well, who is it that benefits from this intervention into this country or that? Is it representing the people that compose our democracy or is it representing some corporation that we had decided to go into this part of the world?" So Ramsey has always looked at whatever we have done as a country from the standpoint of, "Does this fit into our constitution? Is it legal? Does it fall into the rule of law?" And he's always analyzed these various things through that perspective.

DB: Indeed, he's somebody who has loved the law, and really respected the first amendment, and made it real by standing up for people who were always under attack by taking controversial stands. Ramsey Clark is certainly an extraordinary human being. It is a great service that you made this film about, as you say, somebody who comes out of the high places of power, the son of a supreme court justice, former attorney general, fighting in some of the most controversial legal battles, trying to hold the United States government accountable under international law. I think that's a pretty interesting part of Ramsey Clark's history, his love for the law, and his dedication to holding U.S.

officials accountable for the things that they were accusing folks around the world of doing.

JS: Absolutely. It's amazing. When he was in the Justice Department as Attorney General, he was fighting Hoover, because Ramsey had made wiretapping illegal. And Hoover was, behind his back, still wiretapping members of the Civil Rights Movement. And it was just one of many, many things.

Ramsey put a stay on executions, and that held until 1994, [from] 1968 until 1994, when Timothy McVeigh was executed for the Oklahoma City Bombings. But he did numerous things like that. He helped to draft the Civil Rights Acts of '64 and '68 and the Voting Rights Act of '65, among other things. So, you could say that this is a man who really fought to make humanity and the lives of everyday people a more fair and just kind of a world. And I hope people get a chance to see this.

DB: Let me interrupt you here now, and let people know that they will have an opportunity to be part of an East Bay media presentation of *Citizen Clark: A Life of Principle*. That's going to be happening here for folks in the [San Francisco] Bay Area. It's going to be happening Wednesday, May 10th, 7 p.m., and it's going to be happening at the East Bay Media Center, 1939 Addison Street, if you're in the Bay Area. It's in Berkeley. It's a work in progress. You can be a part of this visionary film. You can learn more about Ramsey Clark. You can meet the film maker, and have an experience.

If you don't know who Ramsey Clark is, or if you're a young person whose tuned in in recent years to Pacifica radio and KPFA, and you don't know this extraordinary human being, if you're a member of Black Lives Matter, or the various brown revolutionary groups, and the immigrants' rights groups, you should know, you should meet Ramsey Clark as an example of a way to live, an example of the way to, if you will, enforce the law, in an equal way. [...]

By the way, have you heard his response to Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III being appointed to Attorney General? Has he mentioned...?

JS: You know, I haven't.

DB: What a contrast!

JS: I did ask him what he thought about Donald Trump, though. Well, he said "Donald Trump wants to take Lady Liberty and tear her up in pieces, and toss her into the Hudson."

DB: I'm surprised he hasn't made that into a Trump Tower. It's coming.

JS: [Ramsey] did, after all, lead the movement to impeach George Bush, that got 1.5 million signatures for that.

[...]

But, when I did first ask him about what he thought about Donald Trump, he said "Not much." So, those were his two comments. It's interesting that Ramsey is not typically a person that will say a lot of bad things about individuals. It's mostly about the deeds that they do, or the policies that they try to enact. So, he never tries to take it to a personal level.

DB: Right, he focuses on the wars, and the breaking of international law that lead to massive destruction and illegal operations.

JS: Well, especially the loss of life. The sanctions in Iraq killed 1/2 million women and children, more so than any of the casualties from combatants. It's always about the women and children who are the real casualties of any war, that Ramsey tries to address.

DB: Yes, it is. [...]

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
