

# The Werewolves Who Hated Castro

The Little Havana celebrations of Fidel Castro's death last month had a touch of mean-spirited delusion since perhaps Castro's greatest achievement was defying American power and living to die of old age, observes Greg Maybury.

By Greg Maybury

Considering the deluge of bitterness and pique oozing from many in the U.S. political establishment in response to the death recently of Cuba's former leader Fidel Castro, even some folks with more than a passing knowledge of key world events and history in general, might've been left wondering what all the fuss was about. Castro – a man as reviled as he was revered – led that country's 1959 revolution, one of the most portentous tipping points in the Cold War, if not in modern history.

The following might serve at the outset to give such people an idea as to why his passing provoked such a bilious response from Washington. As Wayne Smith, a former U.S. diplomat and ambassador to Cuba in the early years of Castro's reign under President Dwight Eisenhower (Smith was later President Jimmy Carter's Cuban representative), once memorably opined, "Cuba seems to have the same effect on US administrations as the full moon has on werewolves."

Now Smith might've said this almost three decades ago, but as the reaction to the Cuban leader's death indicated, this reality persists, despite the recent thaw in official relations initiated by President Obama. To be sure, there's rarely been a shortage of countries that could lay claim to having this transformative effect on the collective psyche of U.S. political establishment, Iran being a prime example.

But it is Cuba that stands out as an exemplar, and so much of that has to do with Castro himself. Put simply, among the iconic revolutionary's many talents was an unerring ability to get up Uncle Sam's nose, and get away with it so often for so long. Suffice to say, since they seem to have inherited the same basic instincts as their forebears, the bulk of present-day Washington's "Werewolves" must've been privately "howling at the moon" as it were at the *Comandante's* demise at age 90.

Castro was the only world leader who resisted U.S. hegemony and lived to tell the tale, surviving by some accounts more than 630 separate assassination attempts over decades. Indeed, it would not be a surprise if the individual who came up with the expression "terminate with extreme prejudice" had Fidel in mind.

Such is the animus towards all things Cuba and Castro, President George W. Bush refused his offer to provide teams of doctors to assist the Hurricane Katrina relief effort in 2005, one of modern America's worst natural disasters. And with folks like former House Speaker Newt Gingrich labeling Castro a "tyrant" and likewise President-elect Donald Trump dismissing the former Cuban leader as a "brutal dictator" (while also placing in doubt the future of the recent rapprochement with Cuba), it's clear that "animus" is still alive and kicking. For many, Castro's passing is unlikely to change this much. The Werewolves have long memories.

### **A Historic Turning Point**

Although Castro came to power at the tail end of the Eisenhower era, he was catapulted to world prominence shortly after the inauguration of President John F Kennedy in 1961. It was on JFK's watch that the attempts to assassinate Castro began in earnest, all under cover of the infamous Operation Mongoose; this decidedly dodgy "black-op" involved the CIA working in collaboration with the Mafia no less, and assorted pissed-off Cuban expatriates, exiles, and Batista regime "refugees," all seeking to take back the "farm." All this was with the full knowledge of JFK's brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

Although there is much conjecture as to whether JFK actually did know himself about Mongoose's key objective, some find it difficult to accept he *didn't* know given the brothers were "joined at the hip." If indeed JFK did know, then he either ordered those involved – including Bobby – to stop *and* they were ignored, *or* JFK acquiesced. In the latter case, while he may not have been happy with doing so, such was the pressure on him over the Cuban "situation," he may have gone along with it reluctantly. Like with so much of the JFK mythology, we may never know the answer.

Either way, Castro reportedly was deeply disturbed by JFK's 1963 assassination, and the *Comandante* had good reason. Quite apart from having his hopes dashed for a rapprochement with the U.S. (JFK had earlier opened a back-channel communication link with the Cuban government, seeking to ease the tensions between them), Castro knew full well that if the U.S. could plausibly blame him for JFK's murder – which he instinctively felt they'd try to do and which may have been the intention of those who engineered the hit – it would surely have escalated U.S. attacks on Cuba.

The following should further underscore the significant role played by Cuba during the Cold War. When asked in the acclaimed 2003 Errol Morris film *Fog of War* about the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis – specifically, "how close" did the U.S. and the USSR come to an all-out nuclear exchange – then U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara chillingly revealed that the two powers came "*that* close"

(picture a grim-faced McNamara putting the tips of his thumb and forefinger so close there was little daylight between them).

The missile crisis was itself precipitated by Castro, who became an ally of the Soviet Union not long after the revolution of 1959 and who feared a full-scale U.S. invasion after the botched attempt at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. He invited Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev to put some medium-range nuclear ballistic missiles on the island country (a counterpoint to U.S. missiles installed in Turkey).

As Cuba was located less than 90 miles from Florida, this triggered the scariest, most public, and potentially apocalyptic standoff between the two nuclear superpower archrivals. The stakes for humanity had never been greater.

### **Botched Regime Change**

At this point it's instructive to look back at some of the *pre-revolution* history of Cuba and its relationship with its giant neighbor. For our purposes though it is both sufficient and necessary to consider in some detail that other seminal historical tipping point of the Cold War involving Cuba and America, the Bay of Pigs invasion.

For those "buffs" of America's regime change track record, along with its recidivistic propensity for interfering in the affairs – and ruthlessly exploiting both the resources and people – of other countries, the story of Cuba is one with which most will be well acquainted. From the early-to-mid 1950s, Castro fomented a popular revolution, and in 1959 after years of vicious, oppressive and corrupt rule by the U.S. client-dictator Fulgencio Batista, the rebels ousted him.

This is not an unfamiliar motif in the U.S. foreign policy narrative whereby the world's loudest exponent of liberty, human rights, democracy, freedom and the rule of law, consistently relied on "klepto-brutocracies" like Batista's to deliver *anything but* the above to their own people, almost always with varying degrees of unerring, bloody, tragic failure for them.

As for Batista, he'd earned his rightful place in the Client Dictators' Hall of Fame, and then some. For years his rule generated deep-seated discontent, all of which seemed to go unnoticed by the Americans. He, his cronies and the Cuban elites of the era were enthusiastic supporters and beneficiaries of American business involvement in Cuba and, in particular, of the Mob (Batista was in the pocket of the notorious Mafia *capo di tutt'i capi* Meyer Lansky). All were making millions from gambling, prostitution, hospitality and tourism while bleeding the country dry and leaving the general populace far below the poverty line.

To say the Cuban people then were unhappy campers does not begin to describe the political, economic and social climate at the time. Eventually the chickens came home to roost for Batista as they do for most of America's client dictators, although usually too late for those who've suffered under their sclerotic rule.

Much like the Shah of Iran 20 years later and Mobuto Sese Seko in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997 to name just two examples, the U.S. left its hapless client up that brown creek without a paddle when it became obvious just how restless the natives were and how little the Americans could do about it.

In order to avoid having his corrupt and brutal ass tarred and feathered by his ungrateful subjects and run out of town, Batista quit his day job and rode off into the sunset, consoling himself by filling his saddlebags with a large swag of looted booty.

Castro, along with his brother Raul (who in 2008 took over the presidency), aided memorably by Marxist revolutionary, Argentinian doctor Chè Guevara, assumed control of the country. They quickly kicked out the Americans along with the Mafia, and nationalized most of their industries and businesses.

For Lansky and the rest of the Mob in particular, their Golden Cuban Goose was cooked. Yet this was seen as an exceedingly bad development not just for them, but everyone in Washington across the defense, security, intelligence and political establishment and in the boardrooms of those U.S. corporations who'd enjoyed massive profits during the crime/corporate-friendly Batista regime.

Thus was created the circumstances that would eventually lead to the Bay of Pigs invasion (click [link here](#) for an info-graphic and timeline), one of most ill-advised, ill-fated, ill-conceived, ill-managed adventure in U.S. history. A defining event of the Cold War to be sure, but also one of the CIA's biggest cock-ups that set the stage for the Cuban Missile Crisis and possibly Kennedy's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963.

### **The Bay of Pigs Blowback**

Few foreign policy misadventures (those that became public knowledge at least), resulted in more immediate and vociferous response from the American public and international community, as did the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Even fewer ended in such obvious and enduring ignominy. If JFK had been enjoying the ride in Air Force One up until that point then, the "flight" became very bumpy with the Cuban "situation."

JFK was so rattled by the Bay of Pigs experience, he threatened to "splinter the CIA into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the four winds." CIA chief Allen Dulles and two of his senior CIA spook colleagues were eventually forced to hang

up their trilby hats and trench-coats, a move that Dulles neither forgot nor forgave. The CIA, however, survived as an American institution that was synonymous with fighting the dreaded, so-called "Red Menace," which – in the Western Hemisphere at least – was personified by Castro.

As for the Agency and its operatives who survived the purge, they never forgot Kennedy's threat nor his perceived "betrayal" of the Bay of Pigs invaders when the mission went south.

So what exactly happened with the Bay of Pigs? In order to better grasp how it all came together – a phrase not entirely appropriate because when it really counted it all came spectacularly unstuck – some brief background is needed. The original plot was hatched during the Eisenhower administration under Dulles's direction and in concert with his big brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the archetypal Cold Warrior, a man for whom leaders like Castro were anathema.

It involved utilizing the support of Cuban exiles, all of whom were mightily chagrined at the new Cuban leader. If anything the Cuban exiles hated Castro more than the Americans did, and were eager to bed down with anyone who'd help restore them to their former glory.

### **A 'Perfect Failure'**

The truly ironic thing is that the Americans at one point did have opportunities to bring Castro inside the tent before the Soviets did. Despite the fact he'd expropriated the property of some U.S. corporations (including that of the ubiquitous, notorious United Fruit Company of Guatemalan coup fame and the poster child of rapacious, exploitative U.S. corporate fuelled neo-colonialism), he denied being a communist.

Nor were there any signs the as-yet-non-aligned Castro intended to bunk down with the Soviets. On his visit to America in April 1960, Eisenhower refused to even meet with the new leader, despite the fact the U.S. had formally recognized his new government. The sub-text of the Americans' response might as well have been: "If we can't own, pillage, plunder and exploit your country and bleed it dry, we don't wanna know about you. Adios Amigo!"

Whether Fidel might've responded positively to any American overtures is now somewhat academic. But the truth is that no one will ever know. One thing we do know was that when the Americans "passed" on Cuba and ratcheted up the hostility, the Soviets didn't miss a beat. and were "in like Flynn"! The rest as they say, is history, most of it as we'll see, *not so good!* And so the stage was set for the Bay of Pigs.

Aptly described by Peter Kornbluh as *the “perfect failure,”* the Bay of Pigs was a disastrous mix of own goals, “mission myopia,” cock-ups and unalloyed hubris. The plan was so ill conceived that even the normally gung-ho Joint Chiefs of Staff knew it was bound to fail or had serious doubts. There are varying accounts as to whether they properly conveyed this to JFK, or there was some genuine misunderstanding.

But the reality was that the Chiefs had their own agenda – then as now, a not unfamiliar phenomenon in the annals of interagency rivalry within the US military, foreign policy and national security establishment. They wanted a full-scale invasion and knew JFK was not up for that under any circumstances.

Yet in effectively “nodding” a mission they knew had little or no chance of success, they calculated that Kennedy’s hand would be forced politically when that failure became obvious; the JCOS brass would then get their Big Day after all. From there they could claim bragging rights as the guys who came in and cleaned up the CIA’s mess, and Kennedy would cop all the flak for approving this “it seemed like a good idea at the time” operation.

It’s uncertain how the Chiefs were going to explain to Kennedy himself *after the fact* why they did not actively discourage the mission, or whether indeed they even gave this much consideration. It’s possible they short-changed JFK’s ability to “smell the rat” (that effectively he was set up by the CIA and the Chiefs), or figured that he would be so grateful to them later on when they had in fact cleaned up the mess he’d forgive and forget their treachery.

As it turned out, JFK did detect the “odor of rodent” before the mission was finally aborted. In order to minimize the failure, Kennedy refused to approve the necessary extra air cover that everyone was clamoring for, and that they insisted would snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Kennedy didn’t buy this, and, once the penny dropped, seemingly preferred to cut his losses there and then.

From there on, collectively the brass was *persona non grata* with JFK, as he simply deduced he could no longer trust them. Much to their chagrin, they didn’t get their “boots-on-the-ground” gig as hoped. To underscore how unsettled the JCOS were about this, around 18 months later at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the then U.S. Air Force General Curtis (“Bombsaway”) Le May along with his JCOS colleagues began foaming at the mouth and literally wanted to nuke the Soviets *and* the Cubans back to the Neolithic Era. That Kennedy prevailed over this pressure is a matter of history of course; the fact we’re all still here talking about it is some testament to that.

**Lock ‘n Load**

As for the invasion however, with some modification to the original plan, in early April 1961, JFK gave the CIA and the exiled “Cubanistas” – who by this time had foam coming out of *their* mouths – the go-ahead. Presumably this was partly because he had a measure of respect for Allen Dulles and his judgment. While this was Dulles’s (and Eisenhower’s) baby, JFK accepted the parentage.

In preparation for the invasion, equipment, supplies and materiel were parachuted into the designated invasion location earlier with planes piloted by Cuban exiles accompanied by CIA mercenaries. However as luck would have it, much of this logistical support was lost in the swamp close by. Moreover, a *pre*-invasion air support strike was supposed to soften up the Cubans, break their morale, and destroy or render inactive most of the Cuban Air Force. As it turned out, the attack destroyed only a handful of planes, with a number of civilians ending up as collateral damage.

The decision not to follow-up with additional air support left the invaders with their “paramilitary peckers” swinging in the Bay of Pigs’ sea breeze, so to speak. They quickly ran out of – or were unable to locate – their supplies. Over the next three days, there was intense fighting between the two forces; but before it even started really, it was all over for the counter-revolutionary wannabes.

Amazingly, before the invasion, the CIA was apparently tipped off by the Soviets – presumably because they wanted to give the Americans pause about any aggressive military ambitions – that Castro was aware of a possible attack and/or invasion. For his part though Castro apparently expected that any such operation would be a full-scale military campaign, not the piddling bunch of deluded, right-wing, rag-tag, rabble-rousing soldiers of misfortune that eventually did do so.

Incredibly, the CIA folk adopted a “need to know” response to *this* critical piece of information and omitted to tell JFK when there was still ample opportunity, possibly explaining why the normally unflappable president went ballistic later. It’s difficult to see how Kennedy would’ve green-lighted the operation had he been “in the know” on this. In anticipation of such an invasion, the preternaturally charismatic Fidel mobilized all his armed forces and rallied for moral support any and all Cuban nationals who could hold a pitchfork or machete and see over the steering wheels of their Ford convertibles and Chevy pickups.

### **A Cult Following**

The Bay of Pigs invaders eventually were outgunned, outnumbered, out-maneuvered and out-smarted. Having nowhere else to go, the “paramilitaries” high-tailed

back to the beaches of the Bay of Pigs. Those that weren't killed, either surrendered or were captured, with some later executed.

There are some further observations about the Bay of Pigs "fiasco" (as JFK aptly defined it) to note. Before the invasion the Cuban revolution was, by some accounts, running out of puff. Either way, after the botched invasion and the resulting worldwide publicity, it was *unstoppable*.

The location of the Soviet missiles in Cuba in October the next year – the decision taken as a direct consequence of the fallout from the Bay of Pigs to discourage any further thoughts of regime change – was the most provocative, potentially consequential acts in history.

As for JFK, he was both devastated by the failure and humiliated by the fallout of the mission. Given this was a man unaccustomed to failure, it must have been a heavy cross to bear. He'd however get an opportunity to redeem himself with the Cuban Missile Crisis, but his legacy was forever stained. As for the CIA, its senior executives got to understand the meaning of "blowback."

Interestingly, one of the reasons why the Bay of Pigs operation was unsuccessful was much the same as why the Iraq invasion in 2003 was an unmitigated disaster: like those involved in, and who supported, *that* monumental foreign policy miscalculation by the U.S., they believed the Cuban people would be grateful for being liberated from Fidel's tyranny and rise up in arms against the oppressors. Of course, history tells a different story.

## **A Historic Moment**

The events surrounding Castro and Cuba also resonate throughout the enduring mystery of Kennedy's assassination, whether the Official Story of Lee Harvey Oswald and his involvement in the "Fair Play for Cuba Committee" or the Unofficial Story that Kennedy was killed as payback for abandoning the Cuban exiles (and friends of the Mafia) at the Bay of Pigs and his retaliation against the CIA.

No other foreign country comes remotely close to having any more connections to the momentous Kennedy assassination than does Cuba. For this reason alone, Cuba – and by extrapolation Fidel Castro – will feature large in any future historical narrative.

That said – love him or hate him – Castro's place in history is guaranteed, much more so I suspect than most of his critics and enemies, past and present, most of whom are likely to end up as mere footnotes by comparison.

And as we have seen some many times throughout the American Cold War narrative,



every fringe-dwelling, Marxist/Leninist and/or AK-47 packing, left-wing-leaning revolutionary wannabee in Latin America will pull out all stops to see if he or she might emulate Castro's David and Goliath feat and kick the "gringos" where it really hurts.

That none has so far fared as well as Castro is a matter of history. Indeed, we might say this "standing up to the Man" was Castro's most singular achievement. Even now, in the post-Castro era, Cuba itself will always remain an historically ineradicable symbol of fervent resistance to – and overt defiance of – Uncle Sam's unerring, recidivistic predisposition for pillage and plunder in other people's backyards.

For years, the CIA expended more time, money, ingenuity and energy in trying to "off" Fidel than they have in trying to "off" all of the other heads of state together that they've ever had in their sights for over 60 years. They cooked up all manner of outrageous, cockamamie Spy v Spy schemes such as placing small exploding devices in his cigars; administering exotic bacteria, viruses or toxic poisons by a multitude of means and methods; and giving him LSD in public so he'd flip out and lose face.

They even considered using *non-discernible microbionoculators* (lethal darts with undetectable poison fired from a high-powered gun), to all manner of bizarre plots and schemes such as administering chemicals to make the *Comandante's* facial hair fall out.

The fact then that Castro still saw off 10 U.S. presidents is a remarkable feat unto itself. His success at survival made the celebrations in Little Havana in Miami, Florida, at the news of his death at age 90 seem pathetic and silly. While the anti-Castro Cubans may have been grinning from ear to ear and jumping for joy, it seems safe to say "Fiddy" had the last laugh on both his enemies in Miami and the Werewolves of Washington.

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## Extracting Castro from the Demonization

The mainstream U.S. news media often lacks historical perspective, a problem most acute when the subject, like Fidel Castro, has faced Official Washington's geopolitical demonization, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

There was something both sad and disturbing about popular American reactions to the death of Fidel Castro on Nov. 25. According to The New York Times, news of his death caused much of the Cuban American population of south Florida to “fill Miami’s streets with song.” Those were songs of “rejoicing” rather than dirges. We will examine why these celebrations occurred later in this analysis. However, first we want to give Señor Castro his due.

Fidel Castro was the man who led the successful effort to overthrow the brutal and reactionary dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista – a dictatorship that had the backing of the U.S. government. The Castro-led victory of 1959 began a long period of transformation for Cuba, raising the country from a starkly poor Third World condition to a modernizing socialist state. Here are some of that country’s achievements under Castro’s leadership:

- The expansion of nationwide public education, which uplifted the Cuban population from being largely illiterate to being mostly literate.
- The introduction and development of a modern and accessible public health care system, which all but eliminated death from curable diseases and greatly reduced the infant mortality rate.
- The expansion of services, such as the electric grid, sewage systems, and a reliable water supply, into the countryside.
- The establishment of programs of sustainable development as the nation’s economy diversified according to environmentally safe guidelines. This did involve redistribution of large landed estates to over a quarter million peasants.
- A significant reduction of both racism and sexism through education and new laws.
- A considerable reduction of economic disparities.

There was, of course, a price to be paid for these advances. All of this and more was made possible by instituting a socialist economy and a one-party government. This alienated much of the country’s upper and middle classes. Resistance brought varying degrees of repression. Over time many of those whose economic lifestyles were compromised learned to resent and indeed hate Castro. Tens of thousands of them fled to the United States.

If the socialist road was, predictably, going to divide Cuba in such a drastic way, why did Castro decide to go this route? It was not, as popularly believed, because he came to power a convinced communist. His move to the left was in direct reaction to the policies adopted by the U.S. government.

## **A Fateful Visit**

In April 1959, at the invitation of the American Association of Newspaper Editors, Castro paid a visit to the United States. The trip provided an opportunity for consultations with the U.S. government, although U.S. officials only begrudgingly met with Castro. There was a lot of annoyance at his early, if short-lived, declaration of neutrality when it came to the Cold War. President Dwight Eisenhower showed his displeasure with Castro by opting for a game of golf. But Castro did manage to get a three-hour audience with Vice President Richard Nixon.

It seems that the meeting did not go very well. Castro refused to promise swift new elections in Cuba. He was convinced that the nation's priorities were economic and not political. And although Castro protested that he was not a communist, Nixon was suspicious. After the meeting he concluded that Castro was "either incredibly naive about communism or under communist discipline – my guess is the former."

Subsequently, the U.S. government refused any economic assistance to the new Cuban regime. Worse yet, a decision was made to institute "punishment politics." In March 1960, President Eisenhower set up funding for the overthrow of Castro. A year later the Kennedy administration carried out the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion. It was against this background that Castro and his advisers quickly turned to the Soviet Union for the economic and military assistance necessary for their survival.

## **Rejecting Sacrifice**

Do those who jumped for joy in Little Havana on Nov. 25 understand this history? Most of them are the descendants of individuals who rejected Castro's socialist ideals. Their own loyalties were not to Cuban society as a whole, but rather to family and/or a restricted economic community that was being forced to sacrifice for the greater good. Yet, for many Cubans of means, the notion of the greater good proved too threatening to be identified with their local interests.

Thus, the rejoicers' immediate ancestors fled to the U.S. with their portable wealth and formed the political lobby (based, by the way, on the strategy and tactics of the Zionist lobby) that kept the U.S. government scheming against Cuba for over 50 years. Is it any wonder that their children should have a biased view of history?

The Cuban Americans are not the only ones to express a one-sided view of things. Members of the American conservative elite also rejoiced at Castro's death. Here a representative voice is that of George Will, a political commentator whose

columns appear in The Washington Post and other newspapers.

Will's column on Castro's death appeared on Nov. 28 under the title "Cuba a Tomb of Utopianism." It is a historically incorrect judgment by virtue of the fact that Cuba's achievements under Castro's leadership, some of which are listed above, are not utopian at all, but rather quite real. But Will cannot see this any more than the celebrants of Little Havana. For him Castro is nothing more than a "charismatic totalitarian" whose life was "nasty" and whose "regime was saturated with sadism." He goes on to compare Castro to Joseph Stalin and Benito Mussolini.

What is his evidence for these morbid exaggerations? Well, the Cuban government imprisoned some of its opponents, though they allowed many more of them to emigrate out of the country. Between 500 and 700 of Batista's henchmen were tried and executed. Over time the regime manifested increasing authoritarian tendencies largely due to relentless U.S. efforts to destroy the country's economy and overthrow its government.

In other words, the United States created an ongoing wartime situation for Havana. Under such circumstances the historically usual reaction is for a government – any government – to become more controlling. George Will takes no notice of this.

The Cuban American rejoicing at Castro's death, and George Will's misreading it as the a sign of a "dead utopianism," are both disturbing manifestations of historical narrow-mindedness.

In the case of the celebrants, this attitude is no doubt connected to pent-up anger over the fact that something had been taken from them, or from their relatives, as part of an effort to remake a society that, prior to 1959, had only enriched the wealthy and impoverished the poor.

George Will's attitude is a function of his conservative worldview. He gives no credit at all to the economic and social achievements of Fidel Castro because he can't get past his ideologically driven interpretation of the political steps taken to realize them.

And neither of the above will admit to the truth that the Cuba policy of the United States over more than 50 years contributed strongly to the road Castro took.

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# The Remarkable Story of Fidel Castro

Since Fidel Castro's death, the mainstream U.S. news media has been on a flashback to the Cold War presenting one-sided denunciations of the "communist dictator," but there is another side to the story, explains Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

When Fidel Castro died on Nov. 25 at the age of 90, we lost one of the most remarkable leaders of the Twentieth Century. No other head of state has so steadfastly stood up to the United States and survived.

In 1959, the Cuban Revolution, led by Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, overthrew the ruthless Fulgencio Batista, who had come to power in a coup d'état. Batista's government had protected the interests of the wealthy landowners. In order to control the populace, Batista had carried out torture and public executions, killing as many as 20,000 people. During his regime, Batista was supported – financially and militarily – by the United States. Indeed, the U.S. Mafia's gambling, drug and prostitution operations flourished under Batista's government.

Led by Castro, the new Cuban government expropriated U.S.-owned property, companies and holdings in Cuba. The United States responded with a punishing economic embargo, which later became a blockade. The CIA attempted unsuccessfully to overthrow the revolution in the disastrous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

Since 1959, the U.S. government and the expatriated Cuban-Americans who fled Cuba after the revolution have tried mightily to topple the Castro government, without success. Castro survived more than 630 assassination attempts.

## Legacy of Fidel Castro

"What's amazing here is you've got a country that's suffered an illegal economic blockade by the United States for almost half a century and yet it's been able to give its people the best standard of health care, brilliant education," Ken Livingstone, former mayor of London, said in 2006. "To do this in the teeth of an almost economic war is a tribute to Fidel Castro."

Castro practiced a unique form of internationalism. Nelson Mandela credited Cuba with helping to bring down the system of apartheid in South Africa. Cuba fought with the revolutionaries in Angola. And Cuba regularly sends doctors to other

countries and provides foreign nationals with free medical education.

As Nelson Valdes noted in 2013, Castro, together with others, “shaped a foreign policy and national movement around the fundamental concept of national sovereignty, yet devoid of any self-centered nationalism.” He added, “This unique form of national self-determination incorporated other countries on an equal footing. In fact, national sovereignty and solidarity had precedence over ideology.” Thus, Valdes wrote, “Cuba has aided countries, despite the economic and political differences they may have.”

In 1953, in what is considered the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, Castro, his brother Raul and more than 100 other rebels mounted a failed attack against the Batista regime at the Moncada Barracks. Castro was arrested, tried, sentenced to 15 years in prison and released in an amnesty deal two years later.

At his trial, Castro famously said in his defense, “Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me.”

### **U.S. Interference in Cuba**

The U.S. economic embargo was initiated in 1960 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in response to a memorandum written by L.D. Mallory, a senior State Department official. Mallory proposed “a line of action that makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and the overthrow of the government.”

Cuba turned to the U.S.S.R. for assistance, which supported the Cuban Revolution until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1962, in response to the stationing of U.S. nuclear missiles in Turkey, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. After a tense standoff, Khrushchev and U.S. President John F. Kennedy negotiated a withdrawal of the missiles from both Cuba and Turkey.

The economic blockade continues to this day. It is an illegal interference in the affairs of the Cuban people, in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Charter of the Organization of American States. Every year for 26 consecutive years, the United Nations General Assembly has called on the United States to lift the blockade, which has cost Cuba in excess of \$ 1 trillion.

U.S. meddling in Cuban affairs did not start in 1959. Since 1898, when the United States intervened in Cuba’s war for independence, the U.S. government has tried to dominate Cuba. The United States gained control of Guantanamo Bay in 1903, when Cuba was occupied by the U.S. Army after its intervention in Cuba’s war of independence against Spain.

Cuba was forced to accept the Platt Amendment to its constitution as a prerequisite for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Cuba. That amendment provided the basis for a treaty granting the United States jurisdiction over Guantanamo Bay.

The 1903 agreement gave the United States the right to use Guantanamo Bay “exclusively as coaling or naval stations, and for no other purpose.” A 1934 treaty maintained U.S. control over Guantanamo Bay in perpetuity until the United States abandons it or until both Cuba and the United States agree to modify it. That treaty also limits its uses to “coaling and naval stations.”

None of these treaties or agreements gives the United States the right to use Guantanamo Bay as a prison, or to subject detainees to arbitrary detention or torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, which have been documented at the prison.

Castro, who called the Guantanamo base “a dagger plunged into the heart of Cuban soil,” refused to cash the rent checks the U.S. government sends annually. “An elemental sense of dignity and absolute disagreement with what happens in that portion of our national territory has prevented Cuba from cashing those checks,” he noted. The United States, according to Castro, transformed the Guantanamo base into a “horrible prison, one that bears no difference with the Nazi concentration camps.”

It is no accident that President George W. Bush chose Guantanamo Bay as the site for his illegal prison camp. His administration maintained that Guantanamo Bay is not a U.S. territory, and thus, U.S. courts were not available to the prisoners there. But, as the Supreme Court later affirmed, the United States, not Cuba, exercises exclusive jurisdiction over Guantanamo Bay, so habeas corpus is available to prisoners there.

Amnesty International aptly described the irony: “Given the USA’s criticism of the human rights record of Cuba, it is deeply ironic that it is violating fundamental rights on Cuban soil, and seeking to rely on the fact that it is on Cuban soil to keep the U.S. courts from examining its conduct.”

Since the revolution, anti-Cuba organizations based in Miami have engaged in countless terrorist activities against Cuba and anyone who advocated normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba. These terrorist groups have operated with impunity in the United States with the knowledge and support of the FBI and CIA.

For example, Ruben Dario Lopez-Castro, associated with several anti-Castro organizations, and Orlando Bosch, who planted a bomb on a Cubana airliner in

1976, killing all 73 people aboard, “planned to ship weapons into Cuba for an assassination attempt on [Fidel] Castro.”

In the face of this terrorism, the Cuban Five came from Cuba to gather intelligence in Miami in order to prevent future terrorist acts against Cuba. The men peacefully infiltrated criminal exile groups. The Five turned over the results of their investigation to the FBI. But instead of working with Cuba to fight terrorism, the U.S. government arrested and convicted the five men of unfounded charges.

### **Human Rights in Cuba**

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights contain two different sets of human rights, respectively.

*Civil and political rights* include the rights to life, free expression, freedom of religion, fair trial, self-determination; and to be free from torture, cruel treatment and arbitrary detention.

*Economic, social and cultural rights* comprise the rights to education, health care, social security, unemployment insurance, paid maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, reduction of infant mortality; prevention, treatment and control of diseases, as well as the rights to form and join unions and strike.

The U.S. government criticizes civil and political rights in Cuba while disregarding Cubans’ superior access to universal housing, health care, education and its guarantee of paid maternity leave and equal-pay rates.

Unlike in the United States, health care is considered a right in Cuba. Universal health care is free to all. Cuba has the highest ratio of doctors to patients in the world, at 6.7 per 1,000 people. The 2014 infant mortality rate was 4.2 per 1,000 live births – one of the lowest in the world.

Free education is a universal right, up to and including higher education. Cuba spends a larger proportion of its gross domestic product on education than any other country in the world.

Cuban law guarantees the right to voluntarily form and join trade unions. Unions are legally independent and financially autonomous, independent of the Communist Party and the state. Unions have the right to stop work they consider dangerous. They have the right to participate in company management, to receive management information, to office space and materials, and to facility time for representatives. Union agreement is required for layoffs, changes in patterns of working hours and overtime, and for input on the annual safety report.



As of 2018, the date of the next Cuban general election and the date Raul Castro has promised to step down from the presidency, there will be a limit of no more than two five-year terms for all senior elected positions, including the president. Anyone can be nominated to be a candidate. It is not required that one be a member of the Communist Party. No money can be spent promoting candidates and no political parties (including the Communist Party) are permitted to campaign during elections. Military personnel are not on duty at polling stations; school children guard the ballot boxes.

In 2006, the World Wildlife Fund, a leading global environmental organization, determined that Cuba was the only country in the world to have achieved sustainable development.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government has committed serious human rights violations on Cuban soil, including torture, cruel treatment and arbitrary detention at Guantanamo. And since 1960, the United States has expressly interfered with Cuba's economic rights and its right to self-determination through the economic embargo.

Cuba is criticized for its restrictions on freedom of expression. Castro learned from the Guatemalan experience what would happen if he did not keep a tight rein on his revolutionary government. Jacobo Arbenz, a democratically elected president of Guatemala, carried out agrarian land reform, which expropriated uncultivated lands, compensated the owners and redistributed them to the peasantry. This program raised the hackles of the United Fruit Company, which enlisted the U.S. government to overthrow Arbenz. The CIA and the State Department obliged.

Stephen Kinzer wrote in his biography of the Dulles brothers that Guevara "told Castro why [the CIA coup in Guatemala] succeeded. He said Arbenz had foolishly tolerated an open society, which the CIA penetrated and subverted, and also preserved the existing army, which the CIA turned into its instrument. Castro agreed that a revolutionary regime in Cuba must avoid those mistakes. Upon taking power, he cracked down on dissent and purged the army."

### **Obama Opens the Door**

In 2006, Castro suffered a serious illness and turned over the reins of power in Cuba to his brother Raul, who became president in 2008.

On March 21, 2016, President Obama and Raul Castro held a joint press conference at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana. Obama notably declared, "Perhaps most importantly, I affirmed that Cuba's destiny will not be decided by the United States or any other nation. Cuba is sovereign and, rightly, has great pride. And

the future of Cuba will be decided by Cubans, not by anybody else.” Unlike all prior U.S. presidents, Obama understands the significance of treating Cuba with respect.

This is a lesson Donald Trump will hopefully learn. The President-elect has sent mixed signals about whether he will continue Obama’s steps toward normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba. The businessman in him will be receptive to investment, and, indeed, hotel building, in Cuba.

But, pandering to Cuban-Americans in Florida during the election, Trump talked tough against Cuba’s government. “Many of our leaders seem to view Florida’s Cuban conservatives, including the assassins and terrorists among them, as People Who Vote,” Alice Walker wrote in *The Sweet Abyss*.

On the Cuban side, Raul Castro has made it clear that normalization cannot occur until the blockade is lifted and the United States returns Guantanamo to Cuba. In an op-ed in *The New York Times*, Harvard lecturer Jonathan Hansen wrote, “It is past time to return this imperialist enclave to Cuba,” adding, “It has served to remind the world of America’s long history of interventionist militarism.”

Normalization of relations will not happen overnight, Rene Gonzalez, one of the Cuban Five, told me when I visited Cuba last year. “We have to remember that relations between the countries have never been normal.” Antonio Guerrero, another member of the Five, added that normalization will require “the dismantling of the whole system of aggression against Cuba, especially the blockade.”

Castro survived 90 years. And Castro’s revolution survives, notwithstanding 57 years of aggression and assassination attempts by the United States.

“Fidel Castro was an authoritarian. He ruled with an iron fist. There was repression and is repression in Cuba. In Fidel’s kind of argument, he did it in the name of a different kind of democracy, a different kind of freedom – the freedom from illness, the freedom from racism, the freedom from social inequality,” Peter Kornbluh, director of the Cuba Documentation Project, told Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!* “And Cuba has a lot of very positives that all the other countries that we don’t talk about don’t have. There isn’t gang violence in Cuba. People aren’t being slaughtered around the streets by guns every day. They defeated the Zika virus right away. There is universal health care and universal education.”

In a 1998 NBC interview with Maria Shriver, Castro wryly noted, “For a small country such as Cuba to have such a gigantic country as the United States live so obsessed with this island, it is an honor for us.”

History has absolved, and promises to continue to absolve, “El Comandante” Fidel Castro.

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her most recent book is “Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues.” Visit [her website](#) and follow her at Twitter @marjoriecohn.

This article first appeared on Truthdig

[[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the\\_remarkable\\_legacy\\_of\\_fidel\\_castro\\_20161202](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_remarkable_legacy_of_fidel_castro_20161202)]

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## Trump Ponders Petraeus for Senior Job

**Exclusive:** President-elect Trump’s promise to “drain the swamp” of Washington seems forgotten – like so many political promises – as he meets with swamp creatures, such as disgraced Gen. David Petraeus, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

The news that President-elect Donald Trump called in disgraced retired Gen. David Petraeus for a job interview as possible Secretary of State tests whether Trump’s experience in hosting “The Celebrity Apprentice” honed his skills for spotting an incompetent phony or not.

Does Trump need more data than the continuing bedlam in Iraq and Afghanistan to understand that one can earn a Princeton PhD by writing erudite-sounding drivel about “counterinsurgency” and still flunk war? Granted, the shambles in which Petraeus left Iraq and Afghanistan were probably more a result of his overweening careerism and political ambition than his misapplication of military strategy. But does that make it any more excusable?

In 2007, Adm. William Fallon, commander of CENTCOM with four decades of active-duty experience behind him, quickly took the measure of Petraeus, who was one of his subordinates while implementing a “surge” of over 30,000 U.S. troops into Iraq.

Several sources reported that Fallon was sickened by Petraeus's unctuous pandering to ingratiate himself. Fallon is said to have been so turned off by all the accolades in the flowery introduction given him by Petraeus that he called him to his face "an ass-kissing little chickenshit," adding, "I hate people like that." Sadly, Petraeus's sycophancy is not uncommon among general officers. Uncommon was Fallon's outspoken candor.

The past decade has shown that obsequiousness to those above him and callousness toward others are two of Petraeus's most notable character traits. They go along with his lack of military acumen and his dishonesty as revealed in his lying to the FBI about handing over top-secret notebooks to his biographer/lover, an "indiscretion" that would have landed a less well-connected person in jail but instead got him only a mild slap on the wrist (via a misdemeanor guilty plea).

Indeed, Petraeus, the epitome of a "political general," represents some of the slimiest depths of the Washington "swamp" that President-elect Trump has vowed to drain. Petraeus cares desperately about the feelings of his fellow elites but shows shocking disdain for the suffering of other human beings who are not so important.

In early 2011 in Afghanistan, Petraeus shocked aides to then-President Hamid Karzai after many children were burned to death in a "coalition" attack in northeastern Afghanistan by suggesting that Afghan parents may have burned their own children to exaggerate their claims of civilian casualties and discredit the U.S., reported The Washington Post, citing two participants at the meeting.

"Killing 60 people, and then blaming the killing on those same people, rather than apologizing for any deaths? This is inhuman," one Afghan official said. "This is a really terrible situation."

Yet, on other occasions, the politically savvy Petraeus can be a paragon of sensitivity – like when he is in danger of getting crosswise with the Israel Lobby.

Never did Petraeus's fawning shine through with more brilliance, than when an (unintentionally disclosed) email exchange showed him groveling before arch-neocon Max Boot, beseeching Boot's help in fending off charges that Petraeus was "anti-Israel" because his prepared testimony to a congressional committee included the no-brainer observations that Israeli-Palestinian hostility presents "distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests" and that "this conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. ... Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support."

So, telling the truth (perhaps accidentally in prepared testimony) made Petraeus squirm with fear about offending the powerful Israel Lobby, but he apparently didn't hesitate to lie to FBI agents when he was caught in a tight spot for sharing highly sensitive intelligence with Paula Broadwell, his mistress/biographer. But, again, Petraeus realized that it helps to have influential friends. A court gave him a slap on the wrist with a sentence of two years probation and a fine of \$100,000 – which is less than he usually makes for a single speaking engagement.

### **Military Incompetent Without Parallel**

And, if President-elect Trump isn't repulsed by the stench of hypocrisy – if he ignores Petraeus's reckless handling of classified material after Trump lambasted Hillary Clinton for her own careless behavior in that regard – there is also the grim truth behind Petraeus's glitzy image.

As a military strategist or even a trainer of troops, Petraeus has been an unparalleled disaster. Yes, the corporate media always runs interference for Official Washington's favorite general. But that does not equate with genuine success.

The Iraq "surge," which Petraeus oversaw, was misrepresented in the corporate media as a huge victory – because it was credited with a brief dip in the level of violence at the cost of some 1,000 American lives (and those of many more Iraqis) – but the "surge" failed its principal goal of buying time to heal the rift between Shiites and Sunnis, a division that ultimately led to the emergence of the Islamic State (or ISIS).

Then, in early 2014, the crackerjack Iraqi troops whom Petraeus bragged about training ran away from Mosul, leaving their modern U.S.-provided weapons behind for the Islamic State's jihadists to play with.

In part because of that collapse – with Iraqi forces only now beginning to chip away at ISIS control of Mosul – the Obama administration was dragged into another Mideast war, spilling across Iraq and Syria and adding to the droves of refugees pouring into Europe, a crisis that is now destabilizing the European Union.

You might have thought that the combination of military failures and scandalous behavior would have ended David Petraeus's "government service," but he has never lost his skill at putting his finger to the wind.

During the presidential campaign, the windsock Petraeus was circumspect, which was understandable given the uncertainty regarding which way the wind was blowing.

However, on Sept. 1, 2015, amid calls from the mainstream U.S. media and establishment think tanks for President Obama to escalate the U.S. proxy war to overthrow the Syrian government, Petraeus spoke out in favor of giving more weapons to “moderate” Syrian rebels, despite the widespread recognition that U.S.-supplied guns and rockets were ending up in the hands of Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front.

The new harebrained scheme – favored by Petraeus and other neocons – fantasized about Al Qaeda possibly joining the fight against the Islamic State, although ISIS sprang from Al Qaeda and splintered largely over tactical issues, such as how quickly to declare a jihadist state, not over fundamental fundamentalist goals.

But more miscalculations in the Middle East would be right up Petraeus’s alley. He played an important role in facilitating the emergence of the Islamic State by his too-clever-by-half policy of co-opting some Sunni tribes with promises of shared power in Baghdad and with lots of money, and then simply looking the other way as the U.S.-installed Shia government in Baghdad ditched the promises.

### **Surge? Or Splurge With Lives**

The so-called “surges” of troops into Iraq and Afghanistan are particularly gross examples of the way American soldiers have been used as expendable pawns by ambitious generals like Petraeus and ambitious politicians like former Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

The problem is that overweening personal ambition can end up getting a lot of people killed. In the speciously glorified first “surge,” President George W. Bush sent more than 30,000 additional troops into Iraq in early 2007. During the period of the “surge,” about 1,000 U.S. troops died.

There was a similar American death toll during President Barack Obama’s “surge” of another 30,000 troops into Afghanistan in early 2010, a shift toward a counterinsurgency strategy that had been pressed on Obama by Petraeus, Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Despite the loss of those 1,000 additional U.S. soldiers, the counterinsurgency “surge” had little effect on the course of the Afghan War.

The bloody chaos that continues in Iraq today and in the never-ending war in Afghanistan was entirely predictable. Indeed, it was predicted by those of us able to spread some truth around via the Internet, while being blacklisted by the fawning corporate media, which cheered on the “surges” and their chief architect, David Petraeus.

But the truth is not something that thrives in either U.S. politics or media

these days. Campaigning early this year in New Hampshire, then-presidential aspirant Jeb Bush gave a short partial-history lesson about his big brother's attack on Iraq. Referring to the so-called Islamic State, Bush said, "ISIS didn't exist when my brother was president. 'Al Qaeda in Iraq' was wiped out ... the surge created a fragile but stable Iraq. ..."

Jeb Bush is partially right about ISIS; it didn't exist when his brother George attacked Iraq. Indeed, Al Qaeda didn't exist in Iraq until *after* the U.S. invasion when it emerged as "Al Qaeda in Iraq" and it wasn't eliminated by the "surge."

With huge sums of U.S. cash going to Sunni tribes in Anbar province, Al Qaeda in Iraq just pulled back and regrouped. Its top leaders came from the ranks of angry Sunnis who had been officers in Saddam Hussein's army and – when the "surge" failed to achieve reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites – the U.S. cash proved useful in expanding Sunni resistance to Baghdad's Shiite government. From the failed "surge" strategy emerged the rebranded "Al Qaeda in Iraq," the Islamic State.

So, despite Jeb Bush's attempted spin, the reality is that his brother's aggressive war in Iraq created both "Al Qaeda in Iraq" and its new incarnation, Islamic State.

The mess was made worse by subsequent U.S. strategy – beginning under Bush and expanding under President Obama – of supporting insurgents in Syria. By supplying money, guns and rockets to "moderate" Sunni rebels, that strategy has allowed the materiel to quickly fall into the hands of Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Nusra Front, and its jihadist allies, Ahrar al-Sham.

In other words, U.S. strategy – much of it guided by David Petraeus – continues to strengthen Al Qaeda, which – through its Nusra affiliate and its Islamic State spin-off – now occupies large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

### **Escaping a 'Lost War'**

All this is among the fateful consequences of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq 13 years ago – made worse (not better) by the "surge" in 2007, which contributed significantly to this decade's Sunni-Shia violence. The real reason for Bush's "surge" seems to have been to buy time so that he and Vice President Dick Cheney could leave office without having a lost war on their résumés.

As author Steve Coll has put it, "The decision [to surge] at a minimum guaranteed that his [Bush's] presidency would not end with a defeat in history's eyes. By committing to the surge [the President] was certain to at least achieve a stalemate."

According to Bob Woodward, Bush told key Republicans in late 2005 that he would not withdraw from Iraq, "even if Laura and [first-dog] Barney are the only ones supporting me." Woodward made it clear that Bush was well aware in fall 2006 that the U.S. was losing.

Indeed, by fall 2006, it had become unavoidably clear that a new course had to be chosen and implemented in Iraq, and virtually every sober thinker seemed opposed to sending more troops.

The senior military, especially CENTCOM commander Gen. John Abizaid and his man on the ground in Iraq, Gen. George Casey, emphasized that sending still more U.S. troops to Iraq would simply reassure leading Iraqi politicians that they could relax and continue to take forever to get their act together.

Here, for example, is Gen. Abizaid's answer at the Senate Armed Services Committee on Nov. 15, 2006, to Sen. John McCain, who had long been pressing vigorously for sending 20,000 more troops to Iraq:

"Senator McCain, I met with every divisional commander, General Casey, the corps commander, General Dempsey, we all talked together. And I said, 'in your professional opinion, if we were to bring in more American troops now, does it add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq?' And they all said no.

"And the reason is because we want the Iraqis to do more. It is easy for the Iraqis to rely upon us do this work. I believe that more American forces prevent the Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own future."

The U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, sent a classified cable to Washington warning that "proposals to send more U.S. forces to Iraq would not produce a long-term solution and would make our policy less, not more, sustainable," according to a New York Times retrospective on the "surge" published on Aug. 31, 2008. Khalilzad was arguing, unsuccessfully, for authority to negotiate a political solution with the Iraqis.

There was also the establishment-heavy Iraq Study Group, created by Congress and led by Republican stalwart James Baker and Democrat Lee Hamilton (with Robert Gates as a member although he quit before the review was completed). After months of policy review, the Iraq Study Group issued a final report on Dec. 6, 2006, that began with the ominous sentence "The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating."

It called for: "A change in the primary mission of U.S. Forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq



responsibly... By the first quarter of 2008...all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq.”

### **Rumsfeld's Known-Knowns**

The little-understood story behind Bush's decision to catapult Robert Gates into the post of Defense Secretary was the astonishing fact that Donald Rumsfeld, of all people, was pulling a Robert McNamara; that is, he was going wobbly on a war based largely on his own hubris-laden, misguided advice.

In the fall of 2006 Rumsfeld was having a reality attack. In Rumsfeld-speak, he had come face to face with a “known known.”

On Nov. 6, 2006, a day before the mid-term elections, Rumsfeld sent a memo to the White House, in which he acknowledged, “Clearly, what U.S. forces are currently doing in Iraq is not working well enough or fast enough.” The rest of his memo sounded very much like the emerging troop-drawdown conclusions of the Iraq Study Group.

The first 80 percent of Rumsfeld's memo addressed “Illustrative Options,” including his preferred – or “above the line” – options such as “an accelerated drawdown of U.S. bases ... to five by July 2007” and withdrawal of U.S. forces “from vulnerable positions – cities, patrolling, etc. ... so the Iraqis know they have to pull up their socks, step up and take responsibility for their country.”

Finally, Rumsfeld had begun to listen to his generals and others who knew which end was up. The hurdle? Bush and Cheney were not about to follow Rumsfeld's example in “going wobbly.” Like Robert McNamara at a similar juncture during Vietnam, Rumsfeld had to be let go before he caused a President to “lose a war.”

Waiting in the wings, though, was Robert Gates, who had been CIA director under President George H. W. Bush, spent four years as president of Texas A&M, and had returned to the Washington stage as a member of the Iraq Study Group. While on the ISG, he evidenced no disagreement with its emerging conclusions – at least not until Bush asked him to become Secretary of Defense in early November 2006.

It was awkward. Right up to the week before the mid-term elections on Nov. 7, 2006, President Bush had insisted that he intended to keep Rumsfeld in place for the next two years. Suddenly, the President had to deal with Rumsfeld's apostasy on Iraq. Rumsfeld had let reality get to him, together with the very strong anti-surge protestations by all senior uniformed officers save one – the ambitious David Petraeus, who had jumped onboard for the “surge” escalation, which guaranteed another star on his lapel.

### **All Hail Petraeus**

With the bemedaled Petraeus in the wings and guidance on strategy from arch-neocons, such as retired General Jack Keane and think-tank analyst Frederick Kagan, the White House completed the coup against the generals by replacing Rumsfeld with Gates and recalling Casey and Abizaid and elevating Petraeus.

Amid the mainstream media's hosannas for Petraeus and Gates, the significance of the shakeup was widely misunderstood, with key senators, including Sen. Hillary Clinton, buying the false narrative that the changes presaged a drawdown in the war rather than an escalation.

So relieved were the senators to be rid of the hated-but-feared Rumsfeld that the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Dec. 5, 2006, on Gates's nomination had the feel of a pajama party (I was there). Gates told them bedtime stories – and vowed to show “great deference to the judgment of generals.”

With unanimous Democratic support and only two conservative Republicans opposed, Gates was confirmed by the full Senate on Dec. 6, 2006.

On Jan. 10, 2007, Bush formally unveiled the bait-and-switch, announcing the “surge” of 30,000 additional troops, a mission that would be overseen by Gates and Petraeus. Bush did acknowledge that there would be considerable loss of life in the year ahead as U.S. troops were assigned to create enough stability for Iraq's Shiite and Sunni factions to reach an accommodation.

At least, he got the loss-of-life part right. Around 1,000 U.S. troops died during the “surge” along with many more Iraqis. But Bush, Cheney, Petraeus, and Gates apparently deemed that cost a small price to pay for enabling them to blame a successor administration for the inevitable withdrawal from America's failed war of aggression.

The gambit worked especially well for Gates and Petraeus. Amid glowing mainstream media press clippings about the “successful surge” and “victory at last” in Iraq, Gates was hailed as a new “wise man” and Petraeus was the military genius who pulled victory from the jaws of defeat. Their reputations were such that President Obama concluded that he had no choice but to keep them on, Gates as Defense Secretary and Petraeus as Obama's top general in the Middle East.

Petraeus then oversaw the “surge” in Afghanistan and landed the job of CIA director, where Petraeus reportedly played a major role in arming up the Syrian rebels in pursuit of another “regime change,” this time in Syria.

Although Petraeus's CIA tenure ended in disgrace in November 2012 when his dangerous liaison with Paula Broadwell was disclosed, his many allies in Official Washington's powerful neocon community are now pushing him on

President-elect Trump as the man to serve as Secretary of State.

Petraeus is known as a master of flattery, something that seemingly can turn Trump's head. But the President-elect should have learned from his days hosting "The Celebrity Apprentice" that the winning contender should not be the one most adept at sucking up to the boss.

(Now, with the whole Middle East in turmoil, I find some relief in [this brief parody](#) by comedienne Connie Bryan of Petraeus's performance in training Iraqi troops.)

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then as a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years, from the administration of John Kennedy to that of George H. W. Bush. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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## Washington Post's 'Fake News' Guilt

**Exclusive:** The "fake news" theme has captivated The Washington Post and the mainstream U.S. media so much that it is stooping to McCarthyistic smears against news outlets that don't toe the State Department's propaganda line, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media's hysteria over "fake news" has reached its logical (or illogical) zenith, a McCarthyistic black-listing of honest journalism that simply shows professional skepticism toward Officialdom, including what's said by U.S. government officials and what's written in The Washington Post and New York Times.

Apparently, to show skepticism now opens you to accusations of disseminating "Russian propaganda" or being a "useful idiot" or some similar ugly smear reminiscent of the old Cold War. Now that we have entered a New Cold War, I suppose it makes sense that we should expect a New McCarthyism.

After returning from a Thanksgiving trip to Philadelphia on Saturday, I received word that Consortiumnews.com, the 21-year-old investigative news site that has challenged misguided "group thinks" whether from Republicans, Democrats or anyone else over those two-plus decades, was included among some 200 Internet

sites spreading what some anonymous Web site, PropOrNot, deems “Russian propaganda.”

I would normally ignore such nonsense but it was elevated by The Washington Post, which treated these unnamed “independent researchers” as sophisticated experts who “tracked” the Russian propaganda operation and assembled the black list.

And I’m not joking when I say that these neo-McCarthyites go unnamed. The Post’s [article](#) by Craig Timberg on Thursday described PropOrNot simply as “a nonpartisan collection of researchers with foreign policy, military and technology backgrounds [who] planned to release its own findings Friday showing the startling reach and effectiveness of Russian propaganda campaigns.”

The Post granted the group and its leadership anonymity to smear journalists who don’t march in lockstep with official pronouncements from the State Department or some other impeccable fount of never-to-be-questioned truth. The Post even published a “blind” (or unattributed) quote from the head of this shadowy Web site as follows:

“‘The way that this propaganda apparatus supported [Donald] Trump was equivalent to some massive amount of a media buy,’ said the executive director of PropOrNot, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid being targeted by Russia’s legions of skilled hackers.”

### **The Shoddy Washington Post**

As a professional journalist for more than four decades, it is hard for me to comprehend how a supposedly reputable newspaper like The Washington Post would allow some anonymous character to attack the patriotism of American journalists while hiding the person’s name behind the ridiculous excuse that he or she might be targeted by hackers.

In 1985, when I was an investigative reporter for The Associated Press and first exposed Oliver North’s secret White House operation in support of the Nicaraguan Contra rebels, I got some flak for using North’s name because he claimed that he might be targeted by assassins – even though he was not officially a covert operative. His name and title were listed in the White House directory, for instance.

So, as silly and unfounded as North’s worries were – and The Washington Post then followed me in publishing North’s name – at least North’s concerns dealt with his personal safety. But now we have the Post treating an alleged study by supposed “independent researchers” as needing the protection of anonymity to allow the Web site’s executive director to expound on the group’s slanderous

assessments without giving his or her name.

In such a case, how is the public supposed to evaluate the smears and whether these researchers are indeed “independent” or are funded by some actual propaganda network, like those financed by the National Endowment for Democracy or USAID or financial speculator George Soros or some military-industrial-complex think tank?

Indeed, isn't what this Post-promoted Web site doing the essence of McCarthyistic “fake news” – making vague accusations and imposing guilt by association, suggesting that all the Web sites on its list are either treasonous or dupes?

Though the Post doesn't seem to care about fairness regarding the 200 or so Web sites subjected to this McCarthyism, the smear operation doesn't even present evidence that anyone actually is part of this grand Russian propaganda conspiracy. The PropOrNot site admits that the criteria for its “analysis” are “behaviorial,” not evidentiary.

In other words, the assessment is based on whether this anonymous group doesn't like that some journalist is questioning the State Department's propaganda line or has come up with information that isn't convenient to the NATO narrative on a topic that also involves Russia, Ukraine, Syria or some other international hot spot.

Then, you and other journalists are slimed as either active Russian intelligence operatives or “they are at the very least acting as bona-fide ‘useful idiots’ of the Russian intelligence services, and are worthy of further scrutiny,” according to PropOrNot.

### **A Cold War Slur**

As the Post recognized in its article, the phrase “useful idiot” or “useful fool” comes from the old Cold War – when journalists and citizens who didn't march in lock-step with Washington's propaganda were so stigmatized. That such a grotesque and pejorative phrase was used in this supposedly “independent” study should have been a warning to any professional newspaper to toss the report in the trash can. Instead, The Washington Post embraced it as gospel.

What is further remarkable about this bizarre “study” is that it mixes together a wide variety of diverse political, ideological and journalistic groups, including some of the best independent journalism sites on the Internet, such as Counterpunch, Truthdig, Naked Capitalism, Zero Hedge, Truth-out, WikiLeaks and – I would humbly suggest – Consortiumnews.

Also, neither truth nor fact-based journalism appears to be involved in this “analysis.” No one from this Web site or from The Washington Post contacted me about any alleged inaccuracies or “propaganda” in Consortiumnews’ stories.

Obviously, there have been times when we have challenged “facts” as claimed by the U.S. government and the Post, including their 2002-03 assertions about Iraq’s fictional WMD. (Back then, we were denounced by George W. Bush’s fans as “Saddam apologists.”)

We also have cited cases of disagreements inside the U.S. intelligence community about other “group thinks” that were being pushed by the State Department and the mainstream U.S. news media, such as the CIA’s internal doubts about who was responsible for the Aug. 21, 2013 sarin gas attack outside Damascus, Syria.

Consortiumnews also has cited disclosures buried deep inside articles by the Post and New York Times regarding the important role of neo-Nazis and other ultra-nationalist militias in the putsch that ousted Ukraine’s elected President Viktor Yanukovich on Feb. 22, 2014, and in the subsequent civil war.

I guess readers are supposed to ignore these occasional bursts of honesty from some reporter in the field who feels obliged to mention the Swastikas and other Nazi symbols festooning the rooms and uniforms of these U.S.-backed “freedom fighters” – although the reporter and editors know well enough to stick these references near the end of stories where few people are likely to read. Our “propaganda guilt” is that we read to the end of these articles and highlight these important admissions.

Then, there are times when Consortiumnews has referred to these occasional admissions about neo-Nazis and compared them to positive mainstream references to these same neo-Nazis. For instance, the Times itself included at least one brief reference to this neo-Nazi reality, though buried it deep inside an article. On Aug. 10, 2014, a Times’ [article](#) mentioned the neo-Nazi Azov battalion in the last three paragraphs of a lengthy story on another topic.

“The fighting for Donetsk has taken on a lethal pattern: The regular army bombards separatist positions from afar, followed by chaotic, violent assaults by some of the half-dozen or so paramilitary groups surrounding Donetsk who are willing to plunge into urban combat,” the Times reported.

“Officials in Kiev say the militias and the army coordinate their actions, but the militias, which count about 7,000 fighters, are angry and, at times, uncontrollable. One known as Azov, which took over the village of Marinka, flies a neo-Nazi symbol resembling a Swastika as its flag.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“NYT Discovers Ukraine’s Neo-Nazis at War.”](#)]

Yet, later the Times published a story about the Ukrainian government's defense of the port of Mariupol against ethnic Russian rebels and the Azov battalion was treated as the last bastion of civilization battling against the barbarians at the gate. Remarkably, the article left out all references to the Azov battalion's Nazi Swastikas. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[NYT Whites Out Ukraine's Brown Shirts.](#)"]

It is that exposure of the mainstream U.S. media's distortions of the reality in Ukraine that has apparently earned Consortiumnews a spot on this strange list of willful disseminators of "Russian propaganda" or "useful idiots."

### **Washington Post 'Fake News'**

It also might be noted that Consortiumnews has repeatedly pointed out how The Washington Post falsely reported as flat fact that Iraq was hiding WMD yet the editors responsible for this acceptance of State Department propaganda, which got some 4,500 American soldiers killed along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, have never faced accountability. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A Media Unmoored from Facts.](#)"]

Ironically, too, it should be noted that on Saturday, The New York Times, which also has been [flogging the "fake news" theme](#), ran a [relatively responsible article](#) revealing how a leading "fake news" Web site was not connected to Russia at all but rather was an entrepreneurial effort by an unemployed Georgian student who was using a Web site in Tbilisi to make some money by promoting pro-Trump stories, whether true or not.

The owner of the Web site, 22-year-old Beqa Latsabidse, said he had initially tried to push stories favorable to Hillary Clinton but that proved unprofitable so he switched to publishing anti-Clinton and pro-Trump articles whether true or not.

The front-page Times article revealed what has been happening – entrepreneurs who want to make money have been peddling pro-Trump "news" because that's what gets the clicks and thus the advertising dollars. That behavior does not implicate Consortiumnews or any other independent Web site that happens to challenge State Department propaganda. (Consortiumnews relies on donations from readers and some book sales to meet its modest \$200,000-a-year budget.)

To merge these two groups – profit-driven sites that don't care what the truth is and honest journalism sites that show professional skepticism toward government propaganda whatever its source – is a kind of classic example of "fake news" although in this case the mysterious Web site PropOrNot and The Washington Post are peddling the disinformation.

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](#)).

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## The West's Shift Toward Repression

The West's "liberal democracies" are undergoing a shift toward repression with new initiatives to spy on citizens and punish whistleblowers who expose government abuses, observes ex-British intelligence officer Annie Machon.

By Annie Machon

Forgive my "[infamously fluent French](#)" but the phrase "[pour encourager les autres](#)" – a reference to executing one powerful person to send a message to others – seems to have lost its famously ironic quality. It seems that the U.S. government is globally paying big bucks to people to encourage them to expose the crimes of their employers, but only if they're working for banks and other financial institutions – as opposed to say working for the government and its intelligence agencies.

I have been aware for a few years that the U.S. government instituted a law in 2010 called the [Dodd-Frank Act that is designed to encourage people employed in the international finance community to report malfeasance to the Securities and Exchange Commission \(SEC\)](#), in return for a [substantial percentage of any monies recouped](#).

This law seems to have produced a [booming business](#) for such high-minded "whistleblowers" – if that could be the accurate term for such actions. They are celebrated and can receive multi-million dollar paydays, the most recent (unnamed) source [receiving \\$20 million](#).

Nor is this U.S. initiative just potentially benefiting U.S. citizens – it you look at the small print [at the bottom of this page](#), disclosures are being sent in from all over the world. Which is all to the public good no doubt, especially in the wake of the 2008 global financial crash and the ensuing fall-out that hit us all. We need more clarity about arcane casino banking practices that have bankrupted whole countries, and we need justice.

But U.S. government does send out a number of contradictory messages to those in other areas of work who might also have concerns about the legality of actions



by their organizations which may have equal or even graver impacts on the lives of their fellow human beings.

### **Contrasting Legal Duties**

If you work in finance anywhere in the world and you see irregularities, it is apparently your legal duty to report them through appropriate channels and then count the dollars as they flow in as reward. Such is the power of globalization, or at least the U.S. self-appointed role as the global hegemon.

However, if you happen to work inside the U.S. government, its intelligence agencies or its military, under the terms of the U.S. Constitution, it would appear that you also have a solemn duty under oath to report illegalities that violate the Constitution by going through the officially designated channels and hoping that reform is the result.

But, from all recent examples, it would appear that you get damn few thanks for such patriotic actions. Take the case of Thomas Drake, a former senior National Security Agency executive who in 2007 went public about waste and wanton expenditure within the agency, as I wrote way back in 2011. Before doing so, Drake had gone through all the prescribed routes for such disclosures, up to and including a congressional committee.

Despite all this, Drake was abruptly snatched by the FBI in a violent dawn raid and threatened with 35 years in prison. He (under the terrifying American plea bargain system) accepted a misdemeanor conviction to escape the horrors of federal charges, the resulting loss of all his civic rights and a potential 35 years in prison. He still, of course, lost his job, his impeccable professional reputation, and his whole way of life.

He was part of a NSA group that also included William Binney, the NSA's former Technical Director, and his fellow whistleblowers Kirk Wiebe, Ed Loumis and Diane Roark. These brave people had developed an electronic mass-surveillance program called Thin Thread that could zero in on those people who were genuinely of security interest and worth targeting, a program which would have been relatively cheap, costing only \$1.4 million and would have been consistent with the terms of the Constitution. According to Binney, it could potentially have stopped 9/11 and all the attendant horrors..

Instead, it appears that bureaucratic backs were scratched and political favors called in by the incoming neoconservative government of George W Bush in 2000, and another program called Trail Blazer was developed, to the tune of \$1.2 billion – and which spied on everyone across America (as well as the rest of the world) and thereby broke, at the very least, the terms of the Constitution.

Yet Bill Binney was still subjected to an FBI SWAT team raid – he was dragged out of the shower early one morning at gunpoint. All this is well documented in an excellent film “A Good American” and I recommend watching it.

If the treatment of financial whistleblowers were in place for national security whistleblowers, Binney would have received a payout of millions of dollars for protecting the rights of his fellow citizens and for saving the American taxpayers more than \$1 billion. But, of course, Binney’s whistleblowing was not in the long-term business interests of the now-global surveillance of the National Security State.

### **Eisenhower’s Warning**

President Dwight Eisenhower, in his valedictory speech in 1961, warned of the subversive interests of the “military-industrial” complex. That seems so quaint now as we face a steroid-pumped, globalized military surveillance industry that will do anything to protect its interests. So, rather than holding the powerful and well-connected accountable for fleecing and spying on the American people, it is the principled whistleblowers who are crushed – *“pour encourager les autres.”*

There are the even-more-egregious cases of Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and Edward Snowden. The former, as you may remember, is the former U.S. Army private currently serving 35 years in a military prison for exposing U.S. war crimes. She is the most obvious victim of outgoing-President Obama’s war on whistleblowers and surely deserving of his supposed outgoing clemency.

The latter, currently stranded in Russia *en route* from Hong Kong to political asylum in Ecuador is, in my view and as I have said before, the most significant whistleblower in modern history. But he gets few thanks – indeed incoming Trump administration appointees have in the past called for imposing the death penalty on Snowden.

So all this is a “wonderfully outstanding encouragement” to those in public service in the U.S. – not. Work for a bank and anonymously snitch –ka-ching! Work for the government and blow the whistle – 30-plus years in prison or worse. Hmmm.

If President-elect Donald Trump is serious about “draining the swamp” then perhaps he could put some serious and meaningful public service whistleblower protection measures in place, rather than prosecuting such patriots.

After all, such measures would be a win-win situation, as I have said many times before – a proper and truly accountable channel for potential whistleblowers to go to, in the expectation that their concerns will be properly heard and

investigated.

That way the intelligence agencies can become truly accountable, sharpen their game, avoid financial scandals and better protect the public; and the whistleblowers do not need to ruin their lives, lose their jobs, face imprisonment, or worse.

After all, where are the most heinous crimes witnessed? Sure, bank crimes impact the economy and ruin the lives of working people; but out-of-control intelligence agencies that kidnap, torture and assassinate people around the world, operating in secret, actually *end* lives.

### **Western Repression**

All that said, other Western liberal democracies are surely less draconian than the U.S., no? Well, unfortunately not. Take the U.K., a country still in thrall to the glamorous myth of James Bond, and where there have been multiple intelligence whistleblowers from the agencies over the last few decades – yet all of them have automatically faced prison.

In fact, the U.K. suppression of intelligence, diplomatic and military whistleblowers seems to have acted as an exemplar to other countries in how you stifle ethical dissent from within.

Sure, the prison sentences for such whistleblowing are not as draconian under the U.K.'s Official Secrets Act (1989) as the anachronistic U.S. Espionage Act (1917). But the clear bright line against ANY disclosure is just as stifling.

In the U.K., a country where the intelligence agencies have for the last 17 years been illegally prostituting themselves to advance the interests of a foreign country (the U.S.), this is simply unacceptable. Especially as the U.K. has just made into law the Investigatory Powers Act (2016), which legalizes all this previously illegal activity and indeed expands the hacking powers of the state. (This law was enacted over expert advice.)

More worryingly, the ultra-liberal Norway, which blazed a calm and humanist trail in its response to the murderous white-supremacist terrorist attacks of Anders Breivik five years ago, has now proposed a draconian surveillance law.

And Germany – a country horrified by revelations made by Snowden in 2013 which stirred memories of the surveillance powers of the Gestapo and the Stasi last century – has also just expanded the surveillance authority of its intelligence agencies.

In the face of all this, it appears there has never been a greater need of

intelligence whistleblowers across the Western world. Yet it appears that, once again, there is one standard for financial whistleblowing, complete with generous financial rewards.

But for whistleblowers in the intelligence world, for those Poor Bloody Whistleblowers, it's prosecution and persecution as usual, despite the fact that they may indeed be serving the most profound of public interests – freedom, privacy and the ability to thereby have a functioning democracy.

As always – *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. So back to my fluent French, referenced at the start: we are, it seems, all still mired in the *merde*.

**Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK's MI5 Security Service (the U.S. counterpart is the FBI).**

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## Worrying About Trump's Reactionaries

The mixed signals from Donald Trump's transition are creating diverse interpretations of where his foreign policy is headed, with ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman seeing reasons to worry about more neocon warmongering.

By Melvin A. Goodman

My favorite philosopher, Garrison Keillor, stated in a different era that “it will get worse before it gets worse.” Well, once again, here we are. President-elect Donald Trump's naming of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn as national security adviser; Sen. Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III, R-Alabama, as attorney general; and Rep. Michael Pompeo, R-Kansas, as director of the Central Intelligence Agency suggests that the dangerous positions taken by Trump during the presidential campaign will be supported by his national security team.

All three of these men have pandered to the Trump agenda and have taken particularly hardline views on matters dealing with immigration, the Muslim community, and the use of force. If Donald Trump actually decides to name a special prosecutor to investigate Hillary Clinton's use of email at the Department of State, then he will have the support of these three men.

Lt. Gen. Flynn is in a position to do the most damage to the national security interests of the United States. He was forced into retirement from the military in 2014 when the Joint Chiefs of Staff needed to stop his politicization of intelligence as the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and his brutal management style resembling that of Captain Queeq on the USS Caine.

Flynn reorganized the DIA in order to combine the roles of the intelligence analysts and the operatives, which created a smoother path for politicizing intelligence. This is the same reform that CIA director John Brennan has introduced into the CIA, which has had its own problems with politicized intelligence over the past several decades.

At DIA, Flynn was known for endorsing specious intelligence reports and circulating his support for these reports in what was known facetiously as "Flynn facts." Currently there is an investigation of DIA for the tailoring of intelligence on the success of the U.S. Army in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although the general has been praised for his work in the operational and tactical fields, there are no examples of the kind of strategic thinking or experience to believe that Flynn would be useful in coordinating the policy views of the entire national security bureaucracy or in providing objective and balanced intelligence to the President.

Flynn has already changed his views to accommodate the interests of Trump. Once an opponent of torture and abuse, Flynn over the past year has become a supporter. His consulting company has lobbied on behalf of the authoritarian interests of Turkish President Erdogan, and Flynn himself has been a regular commentator on RT, Moscow's English language propaganda voice.

At the Republican National Convention last summer, Flynn referred to Hillary Clinton as a member of the "enemy camp" and led the chants of "lock her up."

### **Pompeo's Hard Line**

Rep. Pompeo was an initial supporter of the Tea Party and predictably took positions against abortion (even in cases of rape and incest); against the Affordable Care Act; and against any effort on the part of the Environmental Protection Agency to eliminate greenhouse gases. He favors a return to unrestricted massive surveillance by the National Security Agency; a death sentence for Edward Snowden; and more vigorous use of enhanced interrogation techniques at Guantanamo. When his committee was confronted with pictures of hunger strikers at Guantanamo, Pompeo facetiously remarked that it "looked like that they had put on weight."

Pompeo, like other members of the presidential transition staff, is a conspiracy thinker. He and Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, who has been rumored as a possible choice as Secretary of Defense, were strong opponents of the Iran nuclear agreement and believe that there are secret side agreements that favor the interests of Tehran. Pompeo has charged that any Muslim citizen who doesn't vigorously denounce acts of terror is actually complicit with the attacks.

Pompeo was a strong opponent of Senator Dianne Feinstein's devastating report on CIA torture and abuse, and conducted a vigorous attack on Secretary of State Clinton's role in the Benghazi tragedy. When his colleague, former Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Michigan, issued a report exonerating Clinton, Pompeo attached a polemical rebuttal.

Sen. Sessions has been rewarded with the Department of Justice for being the first elected official to come out in support of Donald Trump. He is strongly opposed to any immigration reform, and has received a grade of "F" from various civil rights groups and the NAACP for his opposition to civil rights.

In the 1980s, there was a successful bipartisan effort in the Senate to keep him from becoming a federal judge, with the decisive swing vote coming from Sen. Howell Heflin, D-Alabama. Sessions once referred to the American Civil Liberties Union as "un-American and communist" for "trying to force civil rights down the throats of people."

The appointment of a neoconservative national security team points the Trump administration in an extreme hardline direction. It is possible that the Director of National Intelligence will be weakened or even eliminated, and that the CIA will become even more involved in covert action, including regime change. The sudden resignation of James Clapper as director of national intelligence certainly points in this direction.

President Barack Obama's failure to limit the CIA's paramilitary role and to seek accountability for the conduct of torture and abuse will allow President-elect Trump to get the CIA more heavily involved in paramilitary activities, which have damaged the reputation of the United States and the CIA in the past.

The Iran-Contra scandal tarnished the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. CIA support for the mujahedeen in the 1980s led to the emergence of Al Qaeda and other fundamentalist terror organizations in the 1990s that we are still confronting.

Although President Obama had some success in bringing sunlight into the darkened corridors of the national security state, President-elect Trump's appointment of these individuals suggests that the secret state will once again expand. A greater era of secrecy will be harmful to the interests of American citizens and even to our democracy.

**Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA, National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism*, and the forthcoming**

*Whistleblower at CIA*, scheduled for release in February 2017. Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org), where this story first appeared.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/11/21/trumps-inner-circle-here-come-the-troglodytes/>

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## Failed Investigations of JFK's Murder

More than a half century later, John F. Kennedy's assassination still resonates not only because of its historical importance but because the investigation was more a cover-up than a pursuit of truth, says researcher Gary Aguilar.

By Gary Aguilar

November 22 marks the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. If history is any guide, it's likely some mainstream outlet will commemorate that dark day with reassurances that the Warren Commission was right that Lee Harvey Oswald did it alone, and that most doubters, who have been in the majority since the mid-1960s, are randy conspiracy theorists. That is the essential message by one of the experts likely to be cited this year, attorney Howard Willens.

One of the few still-living Warren Commission staffers, Willens followed up his 2013 book, *History Will Prove Us Right*, with a spirited defense of the Commission in the summer, 2016 issue of the journal, *The American Scholar*, which he co-wrote with another Commission staffer, attorney Richard Mosk. The [piece](#), "The Truth About Dallas," is a celebration of the work and conclusions of the original investigation.

But Willens's and Mosk's defense of the work of the Warren Commission they served on is more notable for what they omit from the official record than what they include. "What the critics often forget or ignore," they write, "is that since 1964, several government agencies have also looked at aspects of our work," (p. 59) as if the Church Committee and the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) had reviewed and applauded the Commission's work.

Indeed, they *did* look at it. But rather than plaudits, they issued stinging rebukes, principally for the Commission's having been rolled by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and to a lesser extent, by the CIA and the Secret Service.

"It must be said that the FBI generally exhausted its resources in confirming its case against Oswald as the lone assassin," the HSCA concluded, "a case that

Director J. Edgar Hoover, at least, seemed determined to make within 24 hours of the of the assassination.”

In essence, the experienced investigators concluded that Hoover had divined the solution to the crime before starting the inquiry, and then his agents confirmed the boss’s epiphany. The intimidated Warren Commission went right along.

And with good reason, only part of which Willens and Mosk tell. They admit that the “FBI had originally opposed the creation of the Warren Commission” and that Hoover “ordered investigations of commission staff members.” But they don’t tell that Hoover deployed one of his favorite dirty tricks to deal not only with support staffers, such as Willens and Mosk, but also with the commissioners themselves.

“[D]erogatory information pertaining to *both* Commission members and staff was brought to Mr. Hoover’s attention,” the Church Committee reported. (emphasis added)

### **Hoover’s Spy**

Willens and Mosk also forgot to mention that Hoover had a personal spy on the Warren Commission, then Rep. Gerald Ford, who tattled on Commissioners who were (justifiably) skeptical of the Bureau’s work.

“Ford indicated he would keep me thoroughly advised as to the activities of the Commission,” FBI Agent Cartha DeLoach wrote in a once secret memo. “He stated this would have to be done on a confidential basis, however he thought it should be done.”

At the bottom of the memo, Hoover scrawled, “Well handled.” The success of Hoover’s machinations was obvious to subsequent government investigators. (Ford, of course, later became President upon the resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974.)

The HSCA’s chief counsel, Notre Dame Law Professor Robert Blakey, a criminal investigator and prosecutor with vastly better credentials than either Willens or Mosk, was impressed with neither the Commission’s vigor nor its independence.

“What was significant,” Blakey determined, “was the ability of the FBI to intimidate the Commission, in light of the Bureau’s predisposition on the questions of Oswald’s guilt and whether there had been a conspiracy. At a January 27 [1964] Commission meeting, there was another dialogue [among Warren Commissioners]:

“John McCloy: ‘... the time is almost overdue for us to have a better perspective



of the FBI investigation than we now have ... We are so dependent on them for our facts ... .’

“Commission counsel J. Lee Rankin: ‘Part of our difficulty in regard to it is that they have no problem. They have decided that no one else is involved ... .’

“Senator Richard Russell: ‘They have tried the case and reached a verdict on every aspect.’

“Senator Hale Boggs: ‘You have put your finger on it.’ (Closed Warren Commission meeting.)” [Blakey & Billings, *Fatal Hour— The Assassination of President*. See also: North, *Act of Treason*]

Testifying before the HSCA, the Warren Commission’s chief counsel J. Lee Rankin shamefully admitted, “Who could protest against what Mr. Hoover did back in those days?” Apparently not President Lyndon Johnson’s blue-ribbon commissioners.

The HSCA’s Blakey also reported that “When asked if he was satisfied with the (Commission’s) investigation that led to the (no conspiracy) conclusion, Judge Burt Griffin (a Commission staff member) said he was not.” [Blakey & Billings, *Ibid.*]

And author Gus Russo reported that Judge Griffin also admitted, “We spent virtually no time investigating the possibility of conspiracy. I wish we had.” [Russo, *Live by the Sword*]

### **Clear Misgivings**

Thus, despite their clear misgivings, the Commissioners bowed to the imperious FBI chief rather than conduct a thorough investigation. Notably, the Commission never once employed a rudimentary investigative tool. “The Commission,” the HSCA reported, “failed to utilize the instruments of immunity from prosecution and prosecution for perjury with respect to witnesses whose veracity it doubted.” [US Cong. House of Reps. Report of Comm. on Assassinations, 1979]

This policy had serious repercussions when the Commission confronted two key issues: published claims that Lee Harvey Oswald had been an FBI informant, and the possibility that Jack Ruby was mobbed up.

“The Commission did not investigate Hoover or the FBI, and managed to avoid the appearance of doing so,” the HSCA determined. “It ended up doing what the members had agreed they would not do: Rely mainly on the FBI’s denial of the allegations (that Oswald had been a Bureau informant).”

Hoover merely sent the Commission his signed affidavit declaring that Oswald was

not an informant and also “sent over 10 additional affidavits from each FBI agent who had had contact with Oswald.” And with that, case closed.

Regarding Jack Ruby, the FBI had his phone records, yet failed to spot Ruby’s obvious, and atypical, pattern of calls to known Mafiosi in the weeks leading up to the assassination. After performing the simple, obvious task of actually analyzing those calls, the HSCA determined that, if not a sworn member of La Cosa Nostra, Ruby had ongoing, close links to numerous Mafiosi.

Thus the HSCA roundly rejected the Warren Commission’s conclusion that, “the evidence does not establish a significant link between Ruby and organized crime.”

The list of Warren Commission shortcomings that the HSCA assembled is not short. A brief summary of them runs some 47 pages in the *Bantam Books* version of the report (p. 289–336), which outlines what required much of the 500 pages of HSCA volume XI to cover (available on-line).

“The evidence indicates that facts which may have been relevant to, and would have substantially affected, the Warren Commission’s investigation were not provided by the agencies (FBI and the CIA). Hence, the Warren Commission’s findings may have been formulated without all of the relevant information.”

The Church Committee said that the problem was that “the Commission was perceived as an adversary by both Hoover and senior FBI officials.” “Such a relationship,” the Committee dryly observed, “was not conducive to the cooperation necessary for a thorough and exhaustive investigation.”

But the FBI did more than just withhold evidence from the Commission. Although they admit that the FBI destroyed a note Oswald wrote to Agent Hosty, and withheld that information from the Commission, Willens and Mosk don’t mention that Agent Hosty reported that his own personnel file, and other FBI files, had been falsified. [*Hosty, Jr. Assignment: Oswald*]

Nor that author Curt Gentry learned from assistant FBI director William Sullivan that there were other JFK documents at the Bureau that had been destroyed. [*Gentry, J. Edgar Hoover— The Man and His Secrets*]

Perhaps one of the reasons the public has remained mistrustful of the government’s conclusions, and the mainstream media reassurances, is the sort of selective presentation of evidence by ax grinders like Willens and Mosk who get heralded by our “responsible” media.

**Gary Aguilar is one of the few physicians outside the government ever allowed to see the still-restricted JFK autopsy photos and X-rays. He has published and**

lectured on the topic of the JFK assassination for many years.

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## Installing a Torture Fan at CIA

**Exclusive:** The CIA's torturers can breathe a sigh of relief after President-elect Trump tapped a defender of "enhanced interrogation techniques" to become CIA director, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

President-elect Donald Trump's selection of Kansas Congressman Mike Pompeo, an open aficionado of torture practices used in the "war on terror," to be CIA director shows that Trump was serious when he said he would support "waterboarding and much worse."

Earlier, there had been a sliver of hope that that, while on the campaign trail, Trump was simply playing to the basest instincts of many Americans who have been brainwashed – by media, politicians, and the CIA itself – into believing that torture "works." The hope was that the person whom Trump would appoint to head the agency would disabuse him regarding both the efficacy and the legality of torture.

But such advice is not likely from Pompeo, who has spoken out against the closing of CIA's "black sites" used for torture and has criticized the requirement that interrogators adhere to anti-torture laws. He has also opposed closing the prison at Guantanamo, which has become infamous for torture and even murder.

After visiting Guantanamo three years ago, where many prisoners were on a hunger strike, Pompeo commented, "It looked to me like a lot of them had put on weight."

There is little doubt that the champagne was flowing on Friday at CIA headquarters, from the seventh-floor executive offices down to the bowels of that building where torture practitioners have been shielded from accountability for 15 years in what amounts to the CIA's internal "witness protection" program.

Indeed, relief over the Pompeo appointment came in the nick of time. For one fleeting moment earlier in the week, there was some panic at the hint that the International Criminal Court might show more courage than President Barack Obama in bringing torture perpetrators to justice.

That suggestion caused a moment of angst up and down the CIA's ladder of authority, from supervisory felons, such as Director John Brennan and agency lawyers, down to the thugs hired to implement the amateurish but gruesome regime of torture depicted in gory detail in the Senate Intelligence Committee investigative report,

Published in December 2014 and based on original CIA documents, the report's Executive Summary revealed a range of gruesome practices from the near-drowning sensation of water-boarding to the forcible rectal feeding of detainees.

### **Pompeo's Defense**

Pompeo responded to the findings by personally attacking Senate Intelligence Committee chair Dianne Feinstein. He claimed she had "put American lives at risk" and he called CIA participants in the torture program "heroes, not pawns in some liberal game being played by the ACLU and Senator Feinstein."

Pompeo seemed to be taking his cue from former chair of the House Intelligence Committee Pete Hoekstra, R-Michigan, who, right after the Senate report was released, boasted to me on live TV that he had been briefed on "90 to 95 percent" of the cruel practices laid bare in the Senate investigation. [See Consortiumnews.com's "Clashing Face to Face on Torture."

Torture also has its supporters in the Senate, which will be called on to confirm Pompeo as CIA director. At a Senate hearing on May 13, 2009, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, gave a tip of the cap to the Spanish Inquisition, which he cited as proof that torture could elicit some useful confessions (as it was used in the Fifteenth Century to detect "crypto Jews" and to burn several thousand heretics at the stake).

During a hearing on detainee interrogations, Sen. Graham said: "Let's have both sides of the story here," pointing out that there could be evidence that torture produced "good information." Graham added, "I mean, one of the reasons these techniques have survived for about 500 years is apparently they work."

On Wednesday, I was given nine minutes on radio to comment on the ICC's tentative move to seek accountability for American torture practices. But Pompeo's nomination on Friday is sure to dispel the brief moment of anxiety among the CIA's torturers.

Congressman Pompeo is living proof that you can get all A's at West Point, graduate first in your class, and still flunk the Constitution with its quaint Eighth Amendment prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishment." Not knowing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights apparently makes you a good pick to head the CIA.

As member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), Pompeo also was protective of the National Security Agency's systematic abuse of the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against illegal searches and seizures.

The selection of Pompeo came a few days after Vice President-elect Mike Pence told ABC that he would model his handling of the job after former Vice President Dick Cheney under President George W. Bush.

Though Pence may have meant Cheney's assertive role and interaction with Congress, there was also Cheney's advocacy for "regime change" wars and what the Bush administration called "enhanced interrogation techniques," which earned Cheney the label from The Washington Post, "Vice President for Torture."

Cheney has never been repentant about his aggressiveness in the "war on terror." "I'd do it again in a minute," he has declared.

### **Real Expert on Torture**

Yet, even as Bush-Cheney apologists found excuses and euphemisms for torture, Gen. John Kimmons, head of Army Intelligence, told a Pentagon press conference on Sept. 6, 2006 – the same day he knew that President Bush planned to advertise the efficacy of his "alternate set of procedures" – that torture did not result in sound information.

Conceding past "transgressions and mistakes," Kimmons insisted: **"No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that."** (*Emphasis added*)

That's also what I learned as a young Army Intelligence officer 50 years ago. Cheney, Hoekstra, Graham, Trump, Pence and Pompeo can keep whistling on the dark side, but there is zero evidence to challenge what Gen. Kimmons had to guts to point out on that important day. The Senate Intelligence Committee report of December 2014 should have long since laid to rest the canard that torture "works."

On a moral level, I also cannot quite fathom the attitude of Pence – who says, "I'm a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican, in that order" – tolerating torture and torture advocates. If memory serves, Jesus Christ was tortured to death.

Lest I seem to be coming down too hard on how so many fundamentalist Christians wink at (or applaud) torture, I must concede that – after 9/11 – the growing acceptance of practices like torture, previously widely condemned as totally unacceptable behavior, gained willing acceptance among many non-fundamentalist

Christians, as well.

Many years ago when I studied ethics at Fordham, New York City's Jesuit university, I was taught that there was one immutable category called "intrinsic evil," which included slavery, rape and torture.

Somehow, torture slid out of that category when Fordham's president, Rev. Joseph M. McShane, SJ, succumbed to the "celebrity virus," and decided to ask alumnus (then-White House aide on counterterrorism and now CIA Director) John Brennan to give the Commencement address in 2012.

Brennan had publicly defended the practice of extraordinary rendition (aka kidnaping, most often for torture). Brennan was also on the routing for emails regarding CIA torture procedures. (It is important to note that, without a demonstrated "need to know," no one is included as an addressee on such delicate matters.)

Adding insult to the injury of giving Brennan such an important invitation, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in "Humane Letters" (what might seem like a sick joke), as fellow honoree, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, applauded from the same platform.

When a number of graduating seniors objected to this profaning of their graduation, President McShane gave a glib gloss on torture and drone killings in these words: "We don't live in a black and white world; we live in a gray world."

(A group that I helped found, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, has written a number of Memoranda on torture and most recently on the CIA's cover-up of torture, an issue completely neglected in the corporate media.)

**Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army Intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years, and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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## Reflections on US Political Tragedies

Two very unpopular candidates made the 2016 presidential campaign an embarrassment for American democracy. Now, the outcome could become one more tragedy for U.S. politics, observes David Marks.

By David Marks

Mourning seems a strange response to election results; as I consider my feelings after the presidential election, I've realized it's another chapter in a sequence of tragedies throughout my life.

I was eleven when the news of President Kennedy's assassination came over the loudspeaker in our sixth-grade classroom. Our tough, yet inspirational teacher wept at her desk in front of us. Her tears taught me more than any explanation of those events could ever reveal.



Not many years later, I suffered the shock of the killings of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and wondered at how these horrific events would shape the future.

I had wanted to be an astronaut, but soon realized that going to the moon as a U.S. Air Force pilot might have the prerequisite of bombing Vietnam. I began understanding the damage the U.S. was doing with its military interventions, and made a conscious decision to stay away from space and politics. It seemed you could only improve yourself to make a better world. Politics was not for the peaceful.

By 1973, the stench of Watergate drifted across the country. I was fascinated; a "smoking gun" is not needed in a murder prosecution, but somehow had become a necessity in political crime. But Nixon's defenders could not counter undeniable evidence of illegal activity by both the President and his aides that was found in White House audiotapes. Most of the political "nobility" escaped the consequences while Nixon and a few accomplices took the fall.

We knew Nixon was a war criminal years before, but Watergate set a precedent that our leaders must be caught in the act of some far narrower and less consequential crime to prove they are scoundrels. We do know that Nixon feared and obsessed on the revelations of worse crimes in his past. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Heinous Crime Behind Watergate.](#)"]

**Retreating from Politics**

Ever more convinced of the darkness in U.S. politics, I retreated further, convinced that only personal actions and relationships could shape the world.

There was a glimmer of hope during Jimmy Carter's presidency; he was a seemingly honest leader, supporting alternative energy and a cleaner environment, and allowing investigations into foreign and domestic assassinations of the previous decade. But few were moved or surprised by the contradiction of the Warren Commission's findings and the Congressional pronouncement that JFK had been killed by a conspiracy.

In 1980, my first daughter was born during the northern California Indian summer. Even the election of Ronald Reagan two months later couldn't eclipse my elation. I recall thinking about how the world might be different when she became a woman. I could only attempt to be a good enough father so that she would be kind and strong, and brave and bright enough to gain her equanimity.

It was only a month after the 1980 election that John Lennon died. It was then I mourned his murder and Reagan's rise as a converged event. Lennon had been hounded by the junta that had taken over the country. He had once observed, "Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. I think we're being run by maniacs for maniacal ends and I think I'm liable to be put away as insane for expressing that."

I recovered with the knowledge that the power of John's music would stay with us, and knew his spirit would give perspective and strength to my daughter and the many children whose lives were just beginning. Despite his passing, John Lennon's open-eyed idealism had been magnified.

The combination of Reagan's rise and Lennon's death in 1980, with the background of earlier assassinations of political leaders, continued to shape my world. Disgusted and repulsed by the "Reagan era," it was a time for further retreat and the nurturing of ideas for a better future.

My second daughter's joyful arrival in February of 1984, coincided with the U.S. "stabilizing" the Middle East, firing shells into Lebanon. Our "ally" Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi people were fighting a horrific ground war with Iran. The conflict was far away, though I knew U.S. interests in oil resources in the region would eventually turn around to impact our lives directly.

Despite the violence perpetrated by our country, I was still resolved to make a better world for both daughters in my own small way. Although very young, I knew they were part of a generation of gifted, empowered women who might be able to change the course of the planet.

## **Hypocrisy of Reagan**



In 1986-87, revelations of the hypocrisy of Reagan and his gang emerged during the Iran Contra investigation and hearings. I was fascinated that Reagan had sent a bible and cake (along with weapons, of course) to Iranian leaders when he had publicly invoked Iran as America's greatest enemy. By helping Iran with sophisticated U.S. weapons for cash, Reagan and his team could secretly fund the Nicaraguan Contras in a dirty war outside the scope of Congress.

The issue of foiling Congress seemed to distract from what was an important question: why was Reagan helping the strongest voices for Islamic Jihad in the region? I recall thinking how any Democratic president would have been impeached, drawn and quartered for such a betrayal to the country. Reagan came away from the "affair" largely unscathed; he wasn't protected by Teflon, as the press claimed, he was surrounded by organized criminals of the highest order.

I could no longer bear just watching events unfold. The crimes of Washington pushed me to where I had to get involved. I offered my support and assisted with the work of a handful of dedicated journalists investigating the 1980 "October Surprise," i.e., tracing back Reagan's secret arms sales to Iran in the mid-1980s to an earlier arrangement in which Reagan secretly approved arms sales via Israel to Iran immediately after taking office in 1981.

The evidence pointed to Reagan's presidential campaign having secretly made a deal with Iranian leaders to delay the release of the hostages until after the U.S. presidential election. Polls had shown that if the hostages were released before Election Day, Jimmy Carter would have won reelection. And, indeed, the Iranians held the hostages until Reagan had taken the oath of office on Jan. 20, 1981.

But the statements and testimony of a couple of dozen witnesses including officials in Iran, Israel, Europe and the United States – along with important documentary evidence – failed to shake off Reagan's Teflon.

In 1991-1992, I watched as a modern version of *The Emperor's New Clothes* played before us. When faced with the possibility that an election would be revealed as a complete sham, Republicans and Democrats stood shoulder to shoulder to deny the possibility and limit the damage. No matter how much evidence emerged (smoking cannons), the truth did not matter when Washington's status quo was threatened. I mourned for our loss of truth.

(To this day, The New York Times and other mainstream media outlets refuse to question the October Surprise conventional wisdom that Reagan must be innocent, although even the chairman of the congressional whitewashing investigation has now admitted to having second thoughts.)

However, as the special prosecutor's Iran-Contra investigation and the congressional October Surprise inquiry extended into 1992, they did cast enough doubt on the Reagan administration's relationship with Iran (and the role of Reagan's Vice President – and then President – George H.W. Bush, a former CIA director) that they affected the presidential election results of 1992.

Along with his approval ratings falling steadily due to the economy, incumbent George H.W. Bush lost the false gloss of being an honest politician. The end of 12 years of Republican presidents came to an end as Bush lost to moderate "New Democrat" Bill Clinton.

### **The Parties Blur**

Fast forward through the Clinton years when the blur between Republican and Democrats became a thick haze. The Republicans, although vaguely different from President Clinton in some social policies and economic preferences, found they could only demonize him for his handling of sexual indiscretions. His real crime was winning a second term in office, which no Democrat had done since Franklin Roosevelt. Meanwhile, U.S. foreign policy only became more firmly aligned with international corporate priorities.

And then quickly (please) through the eight years of George W. Bush. Although the list is long, the penultimate disgrace of his presidency was the mis-applied vengeance over the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11 by using the tragedy to justify the unjustifiable invasion of Iraq.

Bush's horrific administration, staffed heavily with arrogant and incompetent cronies, conducted a war that gave foundation to a generation of angry young people in the Middle East who will always see the United States as a terrorist state. I realized at the beginning of the Iraq invasion that violence is not about politics; I thought, there's a child in Iraq who in 20 years will say: "The U.S. killed my father, I'll gladly walk into Washington with a nuclear backpack."

There was a reprieve of sorts and certainly some refreshing changes with the Obama presidency. But the recognition that Barack Obama would continue the U.S. military enterprises in the Middle East overshadowed any of his more enlightened policies. Yes, his adversaries tried to foil him at every turn, but the priorities of the wealthiest Americans were rarely in question. Washington politics and its ugly international footprint are a continuing tragedy.

And then there is Trump. It took a few days to realize that I was in mourning again, as much as I mourned when leaders were killed or when Reagan came to power; I mourn particularly for my daughters and the younger generations of

women and men who deserve better. My mother, born in 1925, president of her college class, a beloved teacher and still a strong bright woman, feels that the event horizon with Trump gives her more anxiety and fear than she experienced in all of her life, including World War II. She may not see a woman as president of the United States. I mourn for her loss.

### **Hope for Hillary**

I recognize that in many ways Hillary Clinton represented a status quo that has worn on me, but I had some hope that her ascendance to the presidency might change her, and as the first woman in that office, she might take on a leadership role that embraced pacifism; or at least might be influenced by those who feel peace is the priority.

There is much concern for what Trump will do, but the greater pain and loss is about what he won't do. Mourning is always about loss; in this instance, the possibilities of progress that have been taken away for the near future, assuming that Trump continues to align himself with reactionary pols – the likes of Newt Gingrich, Rudy Giuliani, Mike Pence – who stuck with him during the campaign. Many Republicans see Trump as little more than a signature-writing machine who will sign whatever right-wing bills they send him.

So, we will mourn for a while, but a better world can still be realized. My mom and my daughters are no less powerful; and we all can be empowered by the blatant hypocrisy of this election – as we also recognize the hidden history that gave this travesty its foundation.

Political events may influence how we feel; but more importantly, who we are, and what we are willing to do for each other, determines our personal and political future.

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