

# Intel-for-Hire Undermines U.S. Intelligence (Part 2)

Intel-for-Hire is a multilayered phenomenon that's undermining the integrity of U.S. intelligence, argues George Eliason. In this installment, he looks at the second tier of this system. ([Click here for part one.](#) [Part three is here.](#))

By George Eliason

In [part one of this series](#), we looked at the top level of the privatized intelligence community showing that large for-profit companies and individual actors have other interests in mind than the public good. Work that was previously considered inherently governmental is routinely contracted out to people who only serve their own self-interest, which may be at odds with what most people might expect from intelligence – for example, unbiased information to guide sensible policy-making decisions.

Now we'll look at the next level down – the smaller companies, specialty companies, and practitioners that service the top level. We'll see how they fit in the picture and work in real life.



In 2016, Tim Shorrock [wrote an article](#) describing the five intelligence giants that control domestic policy, foreign policy, military, and civilian leaders with the products they sell. They create the information, analyze the information, and decide who the President of the United States will see as an enemy and who as a friend.

The smaller companies provide the resources for them to work with and base their reports on. In the digital age intelligence has become a buyer's market. If the larger company profits more by finding Russian influence at work at a grammar school Christmas play, then that's the conclusion that will be drawn. If you aren't up to the task, someone else will provide the "proof." After all, that's where the money is.

One of the main players in this process is the Chertoff Group, founded by former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff. From the Chertoff Group,

through the Alliance for Securing Democracy, through the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and through the Hamilton 68 Dashboard – which purports to track “Russian influence operations on Twitter” – the information is distilled and passed down to the mid-level players.

Michael Chertoff from 2005-2009 ran the massive Department of Homeland Security, where he was criticized for exempting the DHS from following laws on everything from the environment to religious freedom. A report issued by the Congressional Research Service said at the time that the delegation of unchecked powers to Chertoff was unprecedented. He was also known for railing against international law, warning that treaties such as the Geneva Conventions were placing undue constraints on U.S. actions abroad.

As a long-time insider – in both the public and private sector – he is one of the top figures in the U.S. intelligence-security complex.

### **U.S. (and Foreign) Government Contractors**

Private sector services mirror what they do for government including Intel-for-Hire, espionage, information operations, direct action, and state-sized propaganda operations. This is work that the government has stated on many occasions needs to remain with the agencies that can be held responsible to the public – and not to private companies that aren't.

The contractors and companies work both inside and outside U.S. government circles. They sometimes work for foreign governments. When they are in the private sector, they have no problem attacking and harassing U.S. citizens as well as the rest of the global community. Wherever their clients point, they fire.

This is the part some of the worst offenders take very seriously. In their world, they are James Bond and destroying the reputations of innocent people is a service to their country, and keeps their bank accounts flush with money. In their minds, they are this generation's super-patriots, when in fact, as soon as what they do is opened to inspection, they are common criminals.

People with no security clearances and radical political agendas have state-sized cyber tools at their disposal and can use them for their own political agendas, private business, and personal vendettas the same way they use CIA's Vault 7 hacking tools for state projects. And this has been going on for years.

In a Sept. 2013 Reuters article, Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the reported incidents of NSA employees' violations of the law are likely “the tip of the iceberg” of lax data safeguards. The laws guiding the NSA's spying authority in the first place are a

bigger issue, he said. "If you only focus on instances in which the NSA violated those laws, you're missing the forest for the trees," Jaffer said. "The bigger concern is not with willful violations of the law but rather with what the law itself allows."

The companies and individual actors sell information. For some, this is the basis of how they market their services. They spy on other companies – on regular people – commit espionage and run legally dubious information operations against civilians.

But because of the work they do for both the U.S. government and private corporations, few restrictions are placed on them. Where they are supposed to be supervised by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), in some cases they are supervising themselves and other companies and training DNI agencies to act like them.

Anything marked as "intelligence" is also designated top secret by the all of the DNI agencies, so even something that is originally open-source information becomes "top secret" once it is earmarked for an agency. This is being done on a regular basis at different levels.

### **Legal Gray Zones**

Although some laws are in place restricting these activities, there are legal gray zones that these intelligence players skirt around and operate in when committing acts against the American people. They have identified the key areas of the law and made sure there are built-in loopholes, which Congress keeps in place following hearings at which these people often testify as expert witnesses.

In some cases, they wear their chutzpah on their sleeves.

On September 21, 2015, Joel Harding, who describes himself as an "Information Warfare and IO expert, Strategic Communications, Cyberwar, Ex-Special Forces," posted an advertisement making clear the brazenness with which these privatized spooks operate.

"Ladies, Gentlemen, and everyone in between," he wrote. "I am building a database of planners, operators, logisticians, hackers, and anyone wanting to be involved with special activities I will call 'inform and influence activities'."

He noted that he had received various suggestions to help organize operations against "anti-Western elements."

"No government approval, assistance or funding," he claimed. "This skirts

legalities. This is not explicitly illegal and it may not even be legal, at this point. That grey area extends a long way.” In soliciting resumes, he told prospective partners that if they “have hands on experience of a less than legal nature, you might not want to admit illegal work.”

The first industry hotshot to jump up to help was Andrew Weisburd.

Together with Clint Watts and J.M. Berger, Weisburd has testified to Congress as an expert from the intelligence and security industry. To advance their industry’s profitability, they work with friendly lawmakers to widen those legal gray areas.

Lawmakers, in turn, collect hefty campaign contributions from the industry. In addition, they sometimes get to hear and see intelligence that they may not be authorized to hear and see. Since senators and congressmen are not permitted to look at classified intelligence outside of their mandates on particular intelligence committees, the system of Intel-for-Hire enables privately gathered intelligence to make it to congressional eyes before it is classified.

### **Outsourcing Intelligence**

Despite lacking professional credentials, a commitment to public service, or the minimum amount of vetting that would go into a security clearance background check, these private-sector spies collect intelligence that is passed along and ultimately may be included in the President’s Daily Briefing.

In other words, consultants and “public affairs professionals” with little actual experience in the professional intelligence community – some of whom may have an axe to grind or are just trying to make a buck – can help decide who is an enemy of the state. That’s the reality we are left with even though it sounds like a surreal B-grade movie.

If Weisburd or his partner Clint Watts sound familiar it’s because it is their work testifying in front of Congress in the spring of 2017 on Russian influence on the 2016 election and in social media that is pushing policy and leading us into a new Cold War.

Weisburd and Watts have also established much of the groundwork on which every other Russian menace story – attacking Ukraine, hacking elections, etc. – is based on. Their idea of countering Russian influence has been to take out American, Canadian, and European English language websites owned by citizens of those countries. As Joel Harding’s slogan makes clear, it is a strategy based on information warfare: “To Inform is to Influence.”

Here’s how the parts tie together.

These experts are the “small players” that developed the Hamilton 68 Dashboard for the German Marshall Fund, which is part of the Alliance for Securing Democracy that Michael Chertoff [advises](#).

The dashboard is “an interactive dashboard displaying the near-real-time output of Russian Influence Operations on Twitter—or RIOT, if you’re a fan of on-the-nose acronyms,” according to J.M. Berger. He says that it’s the product of a research collaboration that includes himself, Clint Watts, Andrew Weisburd, Jonathon Morgan and the German Marshall Fund.

So now we have Michael Chertoff advising and supporting the work of Weisburd, Watts, Berger, and possibly Weisburd partner Joel Harding.

It’s just a fact of life at some point, somehow, somewhere, someone is going to take a look at the quality of the work you do and decide if it was worth hiring you or if you are just another scam story trying to stay on the federal dole.

This is that day for the Hamilton 68 Dashboard crew.

Upon closer inspection, it’s a safe bet that many of the people called “Russian trolls” that are allegedly destroying American democracy aren’t Russian or on Russian payrolls at all. They are Americans expressing political views and sharing articles.

The sampling that Clint Watt’s and Andrew Weisburd’s failed Hamilton 68 Dashboard uses is tiny and easily skewed. If a handful of people can generate the second highest hash tag position, the “real time” tracking of Russian propaganda is totally undermined.

More troubling, in recent years more of these Intel-for-Hire contractors have gone offline working with direct action units in other countries that are committing murder. More on this in a later installment.

**George Eliason is an American journalist who lives and works in the Donbass region of Ukraine. For part three of this series, please [click here](#).**

---

## Ten Commonsense Suggestions for Making Peace, Not War

President Trump’s first year in office brought an escalation of military aggression abroad as he built on the interventions of previous administrations, but there are steps America can take to move towards a more peaceful future,

writes retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel William J. Astore at TomDispatch.

By William J. Astore

Whether the rationale is the need to wage a war on terror involving 76 countries or renewed preparations for a struggle against peer competitors Russia and China (as Defense Secretary James Mattis suggested recently while introducing America's new National Defense Strategy), the U.S. military is engaged globally.

A network of 800 military bases spread across 172 countries helps enable its wars and interventions. By the count of the Pentagon, at the end of the last fiscal year about 291,000 personnel (including reserves and Department of Defense civilians) were deployed in 183 countries worldwide, which is the functional definition of a military uncontained. Lady Liberty may temporarily close when the U.S. government grinds to a halt, but the country's foreign military commitments, especially its wars, just keep humming along.

As a student of history, I was warned to avoid the notion of inevitability.

Still, given such data points and others like them, is there anything more predictable in this country's future than incessant warfare without a true victory in sight? Indeed, the last clear-cut American victory, the last true "mission accomplished" moment in a war of any significance, came in 1945 with the end of World War II.

Yet the lack of clear victories since then seems to faze no one in Washington.

In this century, presidents have regularly boasted that the U.S. military is the finest fighting force in human history, while no less regularly demanding that the most powerful military in today's world be "rebuilt" and funded at ever more staggering levels. Indeed, while on the campaign trail, Donald Trump promised he'd invest so much in the military that it would become "so big and so strong and so great, and it will be so powerful that I don't think we're ever going to have to use it."

As soon as he took office, however, he promptly appointed a set of generals to key positions in his government, stored the mothballs, and went back to war.

Here, then, is a brief rundown of the first year of his presidency in war terms.

### **Trump's First Year of War-Making**

In 2017, Afghanistan saw a mini-surge of roughly 4,000 additional U.S. troops (with more to come), a major spike in air strikes, and an onslaught of munitions of all sorts, including MOAB (the mother of all bombs), the never-before-used largest non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. arsenal, as well as precision weapons fired

by B-52s against suspected Taliban drug laboratories. By the Air Force's own count, 4,361 weapons were "released" in Afghanistan in 2017 compared to 1,337 in 2016. Despite this commitment of warriors and weapons, the Afghan war remains – according to American commanders putting the best possible light on the situation – "stalemated," with that country's capital Kabul currently under siege.

How about Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State? U.S.-led coalition forces have launched more than 10,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since Donald Trump became president, unleashing 39,577 weapons in 2017. (The figure for 2016 was 30,743.) The "caliphate" is now gone and ISIS deflated but not defeated, since you can't extinguish an ideology solely with bombs.

Meanwhile, along the Syrian-Turkish border a new conflict seems to be heating up between American-backed Kurdish forces and NATO ally Turkey.

Yet another strife-riven country, Yemen, witnessed a sixfold increase in U.S. airstrikes against al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (from 21 in 2016 to more than 131 in 2017). In Somalia, which has also seen a rise in such strikes against al-Shabaab militants, U.S. forces on the ground have reached numbers not seen since the Black Hawk Down incident of 1993. In each of these countries, there are yet more ruins, yet more civilian casualties, and yet more displaced people.

Finally, we come to North Korea. Though no real shots have yet been fired, rhetorical shots by two less-than-stable leaders, "Little Rocket Man" Kim Jong-un and "dotard" Donald Trump, raise the possibility of a regional bloodbath.

Trump, seemingly favoring military solutions to North Korea's nuclear program even as his administration touts a new generation of more usable nuclear warheads, has been remarkably successful in moving the world's doomsday clock ever closer to midnight.

Clearly, his "great" and "powerful" military has hardly been standing idly on the sidelines looking "big" and "strong." More than ever, in fact, it seems to be lashing out across the Greater Middle East and Africa. Seventeen years after the 9/11 attacks began the Global War on Terror, all of this represents an eerily familiar attempt by the U.S. military to kill its way to victory, whether against the Taliban, ISIS, or other terrorist organizations.

This kinetic reality should surprise no one. Once you invest so much in your military – not just financially but also culturally (by continually celebrating it in a fashion which has come to seem like a quasi-faith) – it's natural to want to put it to use. This has been true of all recent administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, as reflected in the infamous question Madeleine Albright posed to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell in 1992: "What's the

point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?"

With the very word "peace" rarely in Washington's political vocabulary, America's never-ending version of war seems as inevitable as anything is likely to be in history. Significant contingents of U.S. troops and contractors remain an enduring presence in Iraq and there are now 2,000 U.S. Special Operations forces and other personnel in Syria for the long haul. They are ostensibly engaged in training and stability operations. In Washington, however, the urge for regime change in both Syria and Iran remains strong – in the case of Iran implacably so. If past is prologue, then considering previous regime-change operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the future looks grim indeed.

Despite the dismal record of the last decade and a half, our civilian leaders continue to insist that this country must have a military not only second to none but globally dominant. And few here wonder what such a quest for total dominance, the desire for absolute power, could do to this country. Two centuries ago, however, writing to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams couldn't have been clearer on the subject. Power, he said, "must never be trusted without a check."

The question today for the American people: How is the dominant military power of which U.S. leaders so casually boast to be checked? How is the country's almost total reliance on the military in foreign affairs to be reined in? How can the plans of the profiteers and arms makers to keep the good times rolling be brought under control?

As a start, consider one of Donald Trump's favorite generals, Douglas MacArthur, speaking to the Sperry Rand Corporation in 1957:

"Our swollen budgets constantly have been misrepresented to the public. Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear – kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor – with the cry of grave national emergency. Always there has been some terrible evil at home or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up if we did not blindly rally behind it by furnishing the exorbitant funds demanded. Yet, in retrospect, these disasters seem never to have happened, seem never to have been quite real."

No peacenik MacArthur. Other famed generals like Smedley Butler and Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke out with far more vigor against the corruptions of war and the perils to a democracy of an ever more powerful military, though such sentiments are seldom heard in this country today. Instead, America's leaders insist that other people judge us by our words, our stated good intentions, not our murderous deeds and their results.



## Perpetual Warfare Whistles Through Washington

Whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere in the war on terror, the U.S. is now engaged in generational conflicts that are costing us trillions of dollars, driving up the national debt while weakening the underpinnings of our democracy.

They have led to foreign casualties by the hundreds of thousands and created refugees in the millions, while turning cities like Iraq's Mosul into wastelands.

In today's climate of budget-busting "defense" appropriations, isn't it finally time for Americans to apply a little commonsense to our disastrous pattern of war-making? To prime the pump for such a conversation, here are 10 suggestions for ways to focus on, limit, or possibly change Washington's now eternal war-making and profligate war spending:

1. Abandon the notion of perfect security. You can't have it. It doesn't exist. And abandon as well the idea that a huge military establishment translates into national safety. James Madison didn't think so and neither did Dwight D. Eisenhower.
2. Who could have anything against calling the Pentagon a "defense" department, if defense were truly its focus? But let's face it: the Pentagon is actually a war department. So let's label it what it really is. After all, how can you deal with a problem if you can't even name it accurately?
3. Isn't it about time to start following the Constitution when it comes to our "wars"? Isn't it time for Congress to finally step up to its constitutional duties? Whatever the Pentagon is called, this country should no longer be able to pursue its many conflicts without a formal congressional declaration of war. If we had followed that rule, the U.S. wouldn't have fought any of its wars since the end of World War II.
4. Generational wars – ones, that is, that never end – should not be considered a measure of American resolve, but of American stupidity. If you wage war long, you wage it wrong, especially if you want to protect democratic institutions in this country.
5. Generals generally like to wage war. Don't blame them. It's their profession. But for heaven's sake, don't put them in charge of the Department of "Defense" (James Mattis) or the National Security Council (H.R. McMaster) either – and above all, don't let one of them (John Kelly) become the gatekeeper for a volatile, vain president. In our country, civilians should be in charge of the war makers, end of story.
6. You can't win wars you never should have begun in the first place. America's leaders failed to learn that lesson from Vietnam. Since then they have continued to wage wars for less-than-vital interests with

predictably dismal results. Following the Vietnam example, America will only truly win its Afghan War when it chooses to rein in its pride and vanity – and leave.

7. The serious people in Washington snickered when, as a presidential candidate in 2004 and 2008, Congressman Dennis Kucinich called for a Department of Peace. Remind me, though, 17 years into our latest set of wars, what was so funny about that suggestion? Isn't it better to wage peace than war? If you don't believe me, ask a wounded veteran or a Gold Star family.
8. Want to invest in American jobs? Good idea! But stop making the military-industrial complex the preferred path to job creation. That's a loser of a way to go. It's proven that investments in "butter" create double or triple the number of jobs as those in "guns." In other words, invest in education, health care, and civilian infrastructure, not more weaponry.
9. Get rid of the very idea behind the infamous Pottery Barn rule – the warning Secretary of State Colin Powell offered George W. Bush before the invasion of Iraq that if the U.S. military "breaks" a country, somehow we've "bought" it and so have to take ownership of the resulting mess. Whether stated or not, it's continued to be the basis for this century's unending wars. Honestly, if somebody broke something valuable you owned, would you trust that person to put it back together? Folly doesn't decrease by persisting in it.
10. I was an officer in the Air Force. When I entered that service, the ideal of the citizen-soldier still held sway. But during my career I witnessed a slow, insidious change. A citizen-soldier military morphed into a professional ethos of "warriors" and "warfighters," a military that saw itself as better than the rest of us. It's time to think about how to return to that citizen-soldier tradition, which made it harder to fight those generational wars.

Consider retired General John Kelly, who, while defending the president in a controversy over the president's words to the mother of a dead Green Beret, refused to take questions from reporters unless they had a personal connection to fallen troops or to a Gold Star family. Consider as well the way that U.S. politicians like Vice President Mike Pence are always so keen to exalt those in uniform, to speak of them as above the citizenry. ("You are the best of us.")

Isn't it time to stop praising our troops to the rooftops and thanking them endlessly for what they've done for us – for fighting those wars without end – and to start listening to them instead? Isn't it time to try to understand them not as "heroes" in another universe, but as people like us in all their frailty and complexity? We're never encouraged to see them as our neighbors, or as teenagers who struggled through high school, or as harried moms and dads.

Our troops are, of course, human and vulnerable and imperfect. We don't help them when we put them on pedestals, give them flags to hold in the breeze, and salute them as icons of a feel-good brand of patriotism. Talk of warrior-heroes is worse than cheap: it enables our state of permanent war, elevates the Pentagon, ennobles the national security state, and silences dissent. That's why it's both dangerous and universally supported in rare bipartisan fashion by politicians in Washington.

So here's my final point. Think of it as a bonus 11th suggestion: don't make our troops into heroes, even when they're in harm's way. It would be so much better to make ourselves into heroes by getting them out of harm's way.

Be exceptional, America. Make peace, not war.

**William Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and history professor, is a TomDispatch regular. He blogs at Bracing Views. [This article originally appeared at TomDispatch.com and is republished with permission.]**

---

## Biggest Nunes Memo Revelations Have Little To Do With Its Content

The most important revelations of the Nunes Memo relate not to its content, but the political establishment's response to its release, argues Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone

It's fitting that the ever-tightening repetitive loops of America's increasingly schizophrenic partisan warfare finally hit peak shrillness and skyrocketed into a white noise singularity on Groundhog Day. Right now, we're right about at the part of the movie where Bill Murray is driving over a cliff in a pickup truck with a large rodent behind the wheel.

If you only just started paying attention to U.S. politics in 2017 what I'm about to tell you will blow your mind, so you might want to sit down for this: believe it or not, there was once a time when both of America's mainstream political parties weren't screeching every single day that there was news about to break any minute now which would obliterate the other party forever. No Russiagate, no Nunes memo, no Rachel Maddow red yarn graphs, no Sean Hannity "tick tock," no nothing. People screaming that the end is nigh and it's all about to come crashing down were relegated to street corners and the occasional Infowars appearance, not practicing mainstream political punditry for

multimillion dollar salaries on MSNBC and Fox News.

I'm not saying it's a bad thing that Americans are starting to look critically at the power dynamics in their country, but the partisan filters they've pulled over their eyes are causing mass confusion and delusion. Now everyone who questions the CIA is a Russian agent and the term "deep state" suddenly means "literally anyone who doesn't like Donald Trump." Your take on the contents of the Nunes memo will put you in one of two radically different political dimensions depending on which mainstream cult you've subscribed to, and it will cause you to completely miss the point of the entire ordeal.

The part of the memo that has everyone talking today reads as follows: "Furthermore, Deputy Director McCabe testified before the Committee in December 2017 that no surveillance warrant would have been sought from the FISC without the Steele dossier information."

This refers to a surveillance warrant requested by the FBI's then-Deputy Director Andrew McCabe from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court seeking permission to spy on the communications of Carter Page, a member of the 2016 Trump campaign. The controversy revolves around the claim that this surveillance warrant would never have even been requested if not for the clearly biased, Clinton-funded, and error-riddled Christopher Steele dossier which is acknowledged even by its former MI6 author to be 10 to 30 percent inaccurate.

Combine that with the fact that this has never been made clear to the public, and baby you've got yourself a scandal. The FBI knowingly using extremely tainted evidence from one presidential campaign to get permission to spy on another would indeed be a very big deal.

There are some problems with the "BOOM! Bigger than Watergate!" exclamations that pro-Trump partisans have been parading around about this, however. The first is that the memo is only an internal communication between Republican congressmen; it's not a sworn testimony or legal transcript or anything legally binding. It's basically just some Republican ideas about what happened. The assertions made therein are reportedly being hotly contested by Democrats with knowledge of the situation, which is in turn being disputed by Republicans.

Another thing putting a damper on the GOP's "KABOOM!" parade is the fact that the memo's contents are not even entirely new; CNN reported way back in April of last year that sources had informed them that the Steele dossier had been used to get a FISA warrant on the Trump campaign. Additionally, even if every single allegation in the memo is true, the revelations are still arguably far less earth shattering than the Edward Snowden revelations of 2013 exposing the NSA's sprawling domestic espionage network, so the expectation that these less

significant new revelations would cause a radical transformation in U.S. politics when the Snowden revelations did not seem highly unrealistic.

Nonetheless, there have been some extremely important revelations as a result of this memo; they just haven't come from the contents of the memo itself. In the same way that cybersecurity analysts observe the metadata underlying hacked files rather than the contents of the files themselves, political analysts have been pointing out that a lot can be learned about the political establishment by looking at its response to the possibility of the memo's release.

"Memo is clearly not a blockbuster. We can tell so by reading it. Which makes Dems' frantic efforts to prevent anyone from reading it seem even more bizarre," observed TYT's Michael Tracey. "Veracity of memo's claims aside, we were told that its release would undermine the rule of law. So, just checking: is the rule of law still in tact?" he added later.

"Now it is clear to all," WikiLeaks' Julian Assange tweeted. "The claims about how the 'Nunes' memo would destroy 'national security' were lies. Classification stickers are used by bureaucrats trying to obtain 'political security' for their cronies."

"One effect of the memo – it's an example of how extensively we overclassify information," wrote National Review's David French. "I'm highly dubious that any information disclosed threatens national security in any way, shape, or form. I'd be willing to bet the Dem response is similarly harmless. Release it."

Indeed, both the FBI and high-profile Democrats have been claiming that the memo's unredacted release would pose a national security threat, with California Congressman (and virulent Russiagate) Eric Swalwell going so far to call it "brainwashing." A CNN panelist wandered completely off the paddock and suggested that yesterday may have been America's last day as a democracy. Why were they all flipping out so hysterically over a release of information that plainly poses no threat to the American people?

In addition to Assange's assertion that government secrecy has far less to do with national security than political security (a claim he has made before which seems to be proving correct time and time again), there's the jarring question posed by Republican Congressman Thomas Massie: "who made the decision to withhold evidence of FISA abuse until after Congress voted to renew FISA program?"

Whoa, Nelly. Hang on. What is he talking about?

It would be understandable if you were unaware of the debate over the reauthorization of FISA surveillance which resulted in unconditional bipartisan

approval last month – the mainstream media barely touched it. In point of fact, though, the very surveillance practices alleged to have been abused in this hotly controversial memo are the same which was waved through by both the House and the Senate, and by the very same people promoting the memo in many cases.

The McCabe testimony was in December. FISA was renewed in January. Why is all this just coming out now? If the Republicans truly believed that McCabe said what the memo claims he said, why wasn't the public informed before their elected representatives renewed the intelligence community's dangerously intrusive surveillance approval? Was this information simply forgotten about until after those Orwellian powers had been secured?

Of course not. Don't be an idiot.

This makes the kicking, screaming, wailing and gnashing of teeth by the political establishment make a lot more sense, doesn't it? Now suddenly we're looking at a he-said, she-said partisan battle over an issue which can only be resolved with greater and greater transparency of more and more government documents, and we can all see where that's headed. In their rush to win a partisan battle and shield their president from the ongoing Russiagate conspiracy theory, the Republicans may have exposed too much of the establishment foundation upon which both parties are built.

The term "deep state" does not mean "Democrats and Never-Trumpers" as Republican pundits would have you believe, nor does the term refer to any kind of weird, unverifiable conspiracy theory. The deep state is in fact not a conspiracy theory at all, but simply a concept used in political analysis for discussing the undeniable fact that unelected power structures exist in America, and that they tend to form alliances and work together in some sense.

There is no denying the fact that plutocrats, intelligence agencies, defense agencies and the mass media are both powerful and unelected, and there is no denying the fact that there are many convoluted and often conflicting alliances between them. All that can be debated is the manner and extent to which this is happening.

The deep state is America's permanent government, the U.S. power structures that Americans don't elect. These power structures plainly have a vested interest in keeping America's Orwellian surveillance structures in place, as evidenced by the intelligence community's menacingly urgent demand for FISA renewal back in December. If there's any thread to be pulled that really could make waves in the way Official Washington (hat tip to the late Robert Parry) operates, it is in the plot holes between the bipartisan scramble toward unconditional surveillance renewal and the highly partisan battle over exposing the abuse of those very

powers.

If we're going to see a gap in the bars of our cages, that's a great place to keep our eyes trained, so keep watching. Watch what happens in a partisan war where both parties have a simultaneous interest in revealing as little of the game as possible and exposing the other party. Things could get very interesting.

**Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at [Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book [Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers](#).**

---

## Nunes Memo Reports Crimes at Top of FBI and DOJ

Exclusive: The newly released "Nunes Memo" reveals felony wrongdoing by top members of the FBI and DOJ for misrepresenting evidence to obtain a FISA warrant and may implicate other intelligence officials, writes Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

The long-awaited House Intelligence Committee [report](#) made public today identifies current and former top officials of the FBI and the Department of Justice as guilty of the felony of misrepresenting evidence required to obtain a court warrant before surveilling American citizens. The target was candidate Donald Trump's adviser Carter Page.

The main points of what is widely known as the "Nunes Memo," after the House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), have been nicely summarized by blogger [Publius Tacitus](#), who noted that the following very senior officials are now liable for contempt-of-court charges; namely, the current and former members of the FBI and the Department of Justice who signed off on fraudulent applications to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court: James Comey, Andy McCabe, Sally Yates, Dana Boente and Rob Rosenstein. The following is Publius Tacitus's summary of the main points:

- The dubious but celebrated Steele Dossier played a critical role in obtaining approval from the FISA court to carry out surveillance of Carter Page according to former FBI Deputy Director Andy McCabe.
- Christopher Steele was getting paid by the DNC and the FBI for the same information.

- No one at the FBI or the DOJ disclosed to the court that the Steele dossier was paid for by an opposition political campaign.
- The first FISA warrant was obtained on October 21, 2016 based on a story written by Michael Isikoff for Yahoo News based on information he received directly from Christopher Steele – the FBI did not disclose in the FISA application that Steele was the original source of the information.
- Christopher Steele was a long-standing FBI “source” but was terminated as a source after telling Mother Jones reporter David Corn that he had a relationship with the FBI.
- The FBI signers of the FISA applications/renewals were James Comey (three times) and Andrew McCabe.
- The DOJ signers of the FISA applications/renewals were Sally Yates, Dana Boente and Rod Rosenstein.
- Even after Steele was terminated by the FBI, he remained in contact with Deputy Attorney General Bruce Ohr, whose wife worked for FUSION GPS, a contractor that was deeply involved with the Steele dossier.

From what Michael Isikoff reported in September 2016 it appears that the CIA and the Director of National Intelligence (as well as the FBI) are implicated in spreading the disinformation about Trump and Russia. Isikoff wrote:

“U.S. intelligence officials are seeking to determine whether an American businessman identified by Donald Trump as one of his foreign policy advisers has opened up private communications with senior Russian officials – including talks about the possible lifting of economic sanctions if the Republican nominee becomes president, according to multiple sources who have been briefed on the issue. [...]

“But U.S. officials have since received intelligence reports that during that same three-day trip, Page met with Igor Sechin, a longtime Putin associate and former Russian deputy prime minister who is now the executive chairman of Rosneft, Russian’s leading oil company, a well-placed Western intelligence source tells Yahoo News.”

Who were the “intelligence officials” briefing the select members of the House and Senate? That will be one of the next shoes to drop. We are likely to learn in the coming days that John Brennan and Jim Clapper were also trying to help the FBI build a fallacious case against Trump, adds Tacitus.

Indeed, Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR), Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has already indicated that his disclosures in the Nunes Memo represent just “one piece of a probably much larger mosaic of what went on.”

**The Media Will Determine What Comes Next**



As for Congressman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, it is now abundantly clear why he went to ridiculous lengths, as did the entire Democratic congressional leadership, to block or impugn the House Intelligence Committee report.

Until the mid-December revelations of the text messages between FBI lovers Peter Strzok and Lisa Page turned Russia-gate into FBI/DOJ-gate, Schiff had been riding high, often hiding behind what he said “he could not tell” the rest of us.

With the media, including what used to be the progressive media, fully supporting the likes of Adam Schiff, and the FBI/CIA/NSA deep state likely to pull out all the stops, the die is now cast. We are in for a highly interesting time over the next months.

**Ray McGovern works with the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years and co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

---

## Former Ambassador Reflects on Current Events

Former British Ambassador Craig Murray discussed the current situation with Julian Assange, the alleged Russian election hack, Trump’s Israel embassy move and more in an interview with Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. Murray’s books include *Zionism is Bullshit*—censored on Facebook—and *Murder in Samarkand*. He is a self-proclaimed defender and strong supporter of the work of Julian Assange as one of the most significant “Publishers” of our time.

Murray was interviewed by Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein on January 25.

**Randy Credico:** The last time we spoke, Craig, you were involved in a libel suit which I believe had a positive outcome for you. Even as we spoke, you were in route to London to defend yourself from the suit brought against by a gentleman you called a liar, after he publicly called you an anti-Semite because of your

criticism of Israel and the ongoing ethnic cleansing there against the Palestinians. I understand that the suit was dropped just as the case was getting underway. But it cost you a pretty penny before it was over.

**Craig Murray:** Unfortunately, while I didn't lose the case, I still ended up having to pay my lawyers. Libel suits are incredibly expensive in the UK, which is why they are used by corporations and the wealthy to silence ordinary people. My legal bills came to well over \$100,000. Lucky for me, there were over 5,000 individuals who subscribed to our defense fund and that paid the bill for me. But it is frightening because ordinary people are terrified to write anything critical of the wealthy and powerful.

**RC:** I was there right after your suit ended. I was covering Stefania Maurizi's suit in the high court to get email transmissions from the Crown Prosecution Service to both Sweden and the US concerning Julian Assange. She made a great case but in the end they sided with the prosecution. Is the system totally rigged there, or is it libelous to say that?

**CM:** It is fair to say that the establishment stick together. In fact, I believe that the government and the judiciary are closer here than they are in the United States to some extent. There is quite a closed circle of the ruling class. They attend all the same schools and they are closely linked in various ways. So once you take on the establishment, you are taking on the entire establishment.

**RC:** So they are protecting the US government but they are protecting themselves as well. The UK was involved in a lot of the things that Assange exposed—the war logs and some of the cables. Is the motivation to keep him quiet so that the exposures don't continue?

**CM:** Yes, and the corporate press is part of the same nexus and control the public's access to judicial proceedings. Wikileaks very much threatens this control of government information. Wikileaks's motto is "we open governments" and that is very true.

**Dennis Bernstein:** I'd like to talk a little more about Julian Assange's situation. We know that the powers that be try to undermine the spirit as best they can. To date they have been unable to stop Julian from continuing this work for the people. We know he is facing health problems now. How do you assess his condition and what could happen at this point?

**CM:** I last met Julian in the embassy a little over two weeks ago. I am not a medical person but medical professionals now say he is in serious condition, both medical and psychological, from the effects of his confinement. He has a

single room which is about twelve square feet and a smaller room where people from Wikileaks sometimes work with him. The entire Ecuadorian embassy in London is just an apartment.

Julian gets no daylight at all. He doesn't like to go near the windows because of the threats which have been made against him. He gets no outside exercise, which even the worse prison offenders are allowed for a short period every day to get some fresh air and stretch their legs. This kind of confining existence is a real health danger. In addition, there is the indeterminate nature of the whole thing, which is bound to have a severe psychological effect, not having any idea when he is going to be let out.

But having said all that, I have not seen any diminution in his intellectual abilities. In fact, he seems to be even more honed in on the issues of the day. He is extremely well informed on political and social developments and an extremely shrewd analyst. I don't want people to worry about him in that way. But he looks pale and he is obviously not in a healthy state. The dangers of decline are definitely there.

**DB:** The current Ecuadorian government, which would really like to earn some good favor in the United States, could become a very dangerous entity to Julian Assange.

**CM:** In general, Ecuador has been fantastic in what they have done for him. Ecuador is a small country and like most countries in Latin America is vulnerable to pressure from the United States. The political situation there has changed and the left is not in the position it was five or six years ago. There is a heavy CIA presence there, both overt and covert. So I don't criticize the Ecuadorian government, they're in a very difficult position.

**DB:** Facebook has not taken kindly to your recent critique of Zionism. What did they say?

**CM:** An editor has very kindly taken on the task of collecting earlier articles of mine into a book. They include a speech I gave after one of the big Israeli attacks in Gaza. I actually gave the speech in front of a crowd of 350,000 people in Hyde Park. That's when I first used the phrase "Zionism is bullshit," which became the title of the book.

Facebook took down ads for the book, claiming that they objected to the profanity, which is kind of funny because it is a word that appears quite often on Facebook. Later they claimed that the book was banned because the title denigrated a religion. Of course, Zionism is not a religion but a political movement. Many religious Jews do not support Zionism. If I don't agree with a

political position I should be able to say so as plainly as I wish.

**DB:** The current US administration plans to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Would that be in keeping with Zionist policy?

**CM:** Look, my own ancestors were primarily Celtic and we know that 3,000 years ago the Celtic people resided in places like present-day Switzerland. Just because 3,000 years ago some people believed that God gave Jerusalem specifically to the Jewish people, that doesn't mean that you ignore the next 3,000 years and the place should become the capital of Israel based on biblical references. The idea that the rights of the Palestinian people can be ignored because of religious text written down thousands of years ago is absolutely ludicrous.

The Palestinians have had a dreadful time over the last ten years. Not only have they periodically suffered completely disproportionate military attacks but they continue to suffer the appropriation of their land and the destruction of their buildings and farms, with more and more Israeli settlements being built on Palestinian land, to the extent that a two-state solution is no longer viable because so much of what would be the Palestinian state is now Israeli settlements, containing hundreds of thousands of people.

To declare Jerusalem the capital of the Israeli state is going to be a major handicap to any future peace settlement. It is something that the entire international community has resisted doing. It really does set back progress on the Israel/Palestine issue, doing nothing for the cause of peace or for Israeli security. This is being done to gain domestic political advantage in the United States with the Christian Evangelical lobby.

**RC:** Julian Assange has now been granted citizenship as well as diplomatic status by the Ecuadorian government. But the British government refuses to recognize this diplomatic status.

**CM:** Now it gets a little technical. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, if you appoint an ambassador, that ambassador has to be approved in advance by the host country. If you appoint a diplomat to the embassy below the level of ambassador, you don't have to seek agreement in advance. All you have to do is notify. And Ecuador notified the British government of its decision to grant Assange diplomatic status.

Again, the Vienna Convention is absolutely clear that from the moment of notification that person enjoys diplomatic immunity. The host state doesn't have to accept the person, they can declare him or her persona non grata and the person then has to leave the country within a reasonable period of time. But

they have diplomatic immunity from the moment of notification until they leave.

The whole point of diplomatic immunity is to prevent foreign states from effectively kidnapping your diplomats in order to extort from them your country's secrets. So the British government should have to allow Assange to leave the country and he should have immunity while he leaves, but they have stated that they would arrest him if he leaves the embassy.

The remedy would be for Ecuador to take the United Kingdom to the International Court of Justice to oblige the UK to follow international law in this regard.

Whether Ecuador is prepared to do that, I don't know. It would require significant legal resources and time and cost a certain amount of diplomatic capital.

Another option would be, were he to be arrested, his lawyers could take his case to the courts in the UK. But we have spoken already of the close ties between the British courts and the government and whether he could succeed is an open question. The fear is that immediately an extradition request would come in from the United States.

**DB:** The fact is, Julian Assange is a political prisoner who has made an extraordinary practice of monitoring centers of power. They are going to do whatever they can to bring him down. The only real way to save Assange is for the people to be made aware and for them to rise up and prevent the UK government from doing this because this person has performed a great public service on many fronts in many countries.

**CM:** You are absolutely right. He is being persecuted by governments because of the tremendous journalism he has published. It is ironic that at the moment Hollywood is bringing out a film called *The Post* about the Pentagon Papers and that is being celebrated at the same time that the entire establishment is out to get Julian Assange for publishing in exactly the way The Washington Post did.

Of course, The Washington Post has now given up on that and we no longer have a liberal media. The New York Times and The Washington Post are leading the calls for attacks on whistleblowers. Julian Assange exemplifies the only remaining form of free media outlet.

**DB:** You write in your recent piece "The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming", "The complete and unmitigated irrationality of the current epidemic of Russia-phobia does nothing to reduce its incredible virulence as it continues to infect the entire political and media class." That would include The Washington Post, wouldn't it?

**CM:** In fact, the articles that The Washington Post has been spewing out for a

year now on Russiagate and the alleged collusion between WikiLeaks and Russia have been quite remarkable to behold. They appear to have given up any journalistic standards in terms of truthful reporting, in terms of allowing people a chance to reply to their allegations, and in terms of doing any real investigation of the facts. The New York Times is probably just as bad on this story. They have both been astonishing in their inaccuracy.

It is difficult to explain what is happening. The political and intelligence communities have seen WikiLeaks as an enemy ever since the Chelsea Manning revelations. And then the political establishment was very alarmed by the challenges to Hillary Clinton, the first of which was the challenge posed by Bernie Sanders. Then WikiLeaks got a hold of emails from the DNC and Podesta which indicated that the entire playing field was being quite deliberately tilted against Sanders to make sure that he didn't win. This, of course, added to Clinton's unpopularity. All through the campaign opinion polls showed that Clinton was the only person who could possibly lose to Donald Trump. But the establishment made sure that she got the nomination. Already during the campaign she and her people identified Russia as the scapegoat.

So we have had the coming together of these factors: the hatred of WikiLeaks by the intelligence community, the military's need for Russia as an enemy to justify the billions and billions in military spending, and the need of the so-called liberal left for a scapegoat for Hillary's defeat. So you have this kind of perfect storm that has led people to concoct this imaginary scenario where Russia installed the president of the United States in collusion with Julian Assange.

**DB:** So again, was this a hack or a leak?

**CM:** It was definitely not a hack, not by Russia or anybody else. It was a leak of information legally downloaded from their servers. I know this because I am quite closely associated with WikiLeaks. But WikiLeaks never reveal their sources because they are totally focused on source protection.

**RC:** Is there an economic motivation here? Is there a Russiagate industry that has developed?

**CM:** We shouldn't underestimate the NSA and their fantastic capabilities. People from inside the agency, such as William Binney and Edward Snowden, all say that if it were a hack the NSA would have the technical ability to trace that data as it passed through the Internet. They would be able to tell you the exact second the hack occurred and where it went. There is no such data, because it wasn't a hack.

People tend to rationalize doing what makes their employers happy or what they consider to be to their advantage in terms of their career. That is a kind of economic motive, but I think it is largely subconscious. People do what they do to get ahead.

Of course, people at the top have a very definite economic motive. They are trying to maintain corporate control and the control of the political class through a process described by Noam Chomsky [and the late Edward Herman] as “manufacturing consent.” But I believe the foot soldiers subconsciously fall in with what they are supposed to do in order to keep their jobs.

**RC:** You just wrote a piece on Margaret Thatcher and her support for Apartheid in South Africa.

**CM:** It is interesting how the media airbrush history. One of the things which has been airbrushed out of Margaret Thatcher’s history is that she was a strong supporter of the Apartheid system. I have no doubt about this whatsoever because my first job as a foreign officer was at the South Africa desk as a political officer.

The entire two years I was there, we were trying to bring her to understand that Apartheid was evil and had to end. But this went against her strong personal instincts, which were to support Whites-only rule. She successfully opposed any sanctions against Apartheid South Africa. She refused to allow any of her government officials to talk to the ANC or to anybody representing Black people in South Africa.

I have been explaining this to people for many years but people have tended to doubt me because I was going against the accepted narrative. I was very gratified last week that Sir Patrick Wright, the head of the foreign service at that time, published his diaries from that time, where he makes absolutely plain that Thatcher supported Apartheid and that he considered her a racist. I am happy indeed that the truth is starting to get out there.

But the other point is that there are many people in senior positions in the conservative party now—including our minister of defense who just resigned—who at the time were also strong supporters of Apartheid.

**DB:** Meanwhile, as we all know, Apartheid is alive and well in Israel/Palestine. Let us pray that the kind of forces that rose up to end Apartheid in South Africa will also bring pressure to end the situation in Palestine.

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

---

# Mainstream Media and Imperial Power

Noted journalist and filmmaker John Pilger's collection of work has been archived by the British Library, but deep-rooted problems of Western media create an increasingly difficult landscape for ethical journalism, as Pilger explained in an interview with Dennis Bernstein and Randy Credico.

By Dennis J Bernstein and Randy Credico

Emmy award-winning filmmaker John Pilger is among the most important political filmmakers of the 20th and 21st century. From Vietnam to Palestine to atomic war, Pilger's work has been on the cutting edge, and his stinging critique of western media has always be revelatory. And, no doubt, his biting analysis is more relevant and important now than ever. His latest film, "The Coming War on China" powerfully presages the growing potential for war between the US and China.

Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein spoke with Pilger on January 18 about the multiple failures of the corporate press in fanning the phony flames of Russiagate, and turning its back on Julian Assange—acting more like prosecutors than journalists, whose responsibility it is to monitor the centers of power and report back to the people.

They also spoke with Pilger about the recent decision by the British Library to acquire his substantial works and invaluable archives and make them readily available to a much wider audience

Dennis Bernstein: Congratulations, John. Your work has now been made a part of the collection at the British Library.

John Pilger: To see all my written work over the years go onto a single hard drive was a sobering experience. I am pleased, however, because now in the digital age people can access all of my work and I myself can access information I may have forgotten.

Dennis Bernstein: I would like to read a little of what they said on the record when they welcomed your material into the library. They write, "Throughout his career, John Pilger has demonstrated the power and significance of investigative journalism in uncovering stories of people who have been ignored by the mainstream media or left otherwise without voice. His groundbreaking work in Cambodia revealed the devastation caused by the Khmer Rouge and his film *Year*



*Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia* has subsequently been described as one of the ten most influential documentaries of the twentieth century.”

I would like to read now a little of the statement that you sent to the World’s Socialist Conference where they were discussing the deep nature of censorship.

You wrote, “Something has changed. Although the media was always a loose extension of capital power, it is now almost fully integrated. Dissent, once tolerated in the mainstream, has now regressed to a metaphoric underground as liberal capitalism moves toward a form of corporate dictatorship.” And it is getting worse at an exponential rate, wouldn’t you say?

John Pilger: Yes. Chris Hedges is an example of that. He was right in the mainstream at *The New York Times* and now finds himself outside it. Another example is America’s most celebrated investigative journalist, Seymour Hersh, who it appears now can only get published in Germany. Hersh has effectively been ejected from the mainstream in the United States.

In my own case, I navigated my way through the mainstream. My films are still shown on commercial TV in Britain. My written journalism, however, is no longer welcome. Its last home was *The Guardian*, which three years ago got rid of people like me and others in a kind of purge of those who were saying what *The Guardian* no longer says anymore.

That has happened right across the liberal media. *The Washington Post*—which is at the moment going through a period of self-aggrandizement with the release of the film *The Post*—is also the notorious source of a site which listed some of the most distinguished dissenting sites in the United States, including Consortiumnews, Black Agenda Report, Counterpunch and others, as sources of Russian propaganda. It is forcing all of us into this margin, when really the mainstream is in the margin and the margin is in the mainstream.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you talk about the work of Julian Assange in the context of this corporate censorship machine?

John Pilger: Julian Assange has personally borne the brunt of much of this historic shift. He and Wikileaks have exposed so much, and that is unforgivable. There is no doubt that what Wikileaks has done is the most important disclosure journalism of my lifetime. Around the world, politicians who have been deceiving the public have been caught out by the revelations of Wikileaks. It is quite an epic achievement.

Anger has been directed at Julian by people in the media who have been shamed by Wikileaks. Because Wikileaks did the job that journalists ought to have been doing for many years. Wikileaks has done it across such a spectrum and put to

shame those who are paid to keep the record straight. That has been Assange's crime.

Dennis Bernstein: It has come to the point where to tell the truth is to commit professional suicide.

Randy Credico: At the recent World Socialist Conference, Julian Assange warned of what he called the "super states" on the internet and how much power they have—the Facebooks and Googles, etc.

John Pilger: He raised the whole specter of artificial intelligence and how it can be abused by the undemocratic forces that control so much of the world. I think what he had to say was very interesting and extremely timely. It is important to remember that Assange is a refugee and that the refugee is almost a symbol of our times. There are those who try to cross the Mediterranean and don't make it or who cross deserts to get work to support their families.

Julian is a political refugee who is trying to inform us of something we either don't know about or are unwilling to talk about. The United Nations has recognized that he is being detained unlawfully. It is interesting to hear what he says but we also have to keep an eye on his welfare. His situation should be a burning issue for journalists everywhere. If it can happen to him, it can happen to any of us.

Randy Credico: A lot of mainstream journalists complain when Trump refers to them as the enemy of the people, but they have shown themselves to be very unwilling to circle the wagons around Assange. What is the upshot for journalists of Assange being taken down?

John Pilger: Trump knows which nerves to touch. His campaign against the mainstream media may even help to get him re-elected, because most people don't trust the mainstream media anymore.

In my experience as a journalist, the public have always been ahead of the media. And yet, in many news outlets there has always been a kind of veiled contempt for the public. You find young journalists affecting a false cynicism that they think ordains them as journalists. The cynicism is not about the people at the top, it's about the people at the bottom, the people that Hillary Clinton dismissed as "irredeemable."

CNN and NBC and the rest of the networks have been the voices of power and have been the source of distorted news for such a long time. They are not circling the wagons because the wagons are on the wrong side. These people in the mainstream have been an extension of the power that has corrupted so much of our body politic. They have been the sources of so many myths.

This latest film about *The Post* neglects to mention that *The Washington Post* was a passionate supporter of the Vietnam War before it decided to have a moral crisis about whether to publish the Pentagon Papers. Today, *The Washington Post* has a \$600 million deal with the CIA to supply them with information.

Media in the West is now an extension of imperial power. It is no longer a loose extension, it is a direct extension. Whether or not it has fallen out with Donald Trump is completely irrelevant. It is lined up with all the forces that want to get rid of Donald Trump. He is not the one they want in the White House, they wanted Hillary Clinton, who is safer and more reliable.

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

---

## Foxes in Charge of Intelligence Hen House

Recent revelations of “inadvertent” deletions of electronic data at the FBI and NSA relating to alleged felonies are being described as a “foul-up,” but the intelligence agencies’ track record suggests a possibly more nefarious explanation, explains Ray McGovern in this op-ed.

By Ray McGovern

We learned in recent days that the FBI and the National Security Agency “inadvertently” deleted electronic messages relating to reported felonies, but one noxious reality persists: No one in the FBI or NSA is likely to be held to account for these “mistakes.”

It is a 70 year-old tradition. Today’s lack of accountability is enabled by (1) corruption at the top of intelligence agencies; (2) the convenient secrecy behind which their leaders hide; (3) bureaucratic indignities and structural flaws in the system; (4) the indulgence/complicity of most of the “mainstream media;” and (5) the eunuchs leading the Congressional “oversight” committees, who – history shows – can be bullied by threats, including blackmail, a la former longtime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

It is a safe bet, though, that neither the FBI nor NSA have deleted their holdings on key Congressional leaders – including House Democratic minority leader Nancy Pelosi, who used to boast about her very long tenure as head of the

House Intelligence Committee, only to complain later that “they [intelligence officials] mislead us all the time.”

In fact, Pelosi was briefed by the NSA and CIA on all manner of crimes, including warrantless surveillance of U.S. citizens, in violation of the Fourth Amendment, and torture.

The lack of intelligence accountability has created a kind of perfect storm, enabling felonies and lesser mischief ordered by those sitting atop the intelligence community. While press reports indicate that the Congressional oversight committees now have “explosive” documentary proof – not yet deleted – of such crimes, it remains to be seen whether the committees will have the courage to do their duty under the law.

Even if they try, the odds are against their being able to make much headway, in the face of stiff resistance from the heads of intelligence agencies and a suborned/frightened “mainstream media.”

### **Rosemary Woods on Steroids**

Those of us with a little gray in our hair will remember the infamous, 18.5-minute gap “mistakenly” caused by Rosemary Woods, President Richard Nixon’s longtime secretary, while transcribing a key Oval Office tape of a discussion between President Richard Nixon and his partner-in-crime-cum-chief of staff H.R. Haldeman right after the Watergate break-in. (The tape itself was then destroyed.)

Younger folks may recall reporting on the videotapes of waterboarding at a CIA “black site” in Thailand in 2002, tapes that were deliberately destroyed in 2005 at the order of Jose Rodriguez, head of the CIA operations directorate at the time.

Woods testified that she had erased part of the tape by mistake. She suffered no consequences for her “mistake,” and died in 2005 at age 87.

And to no one’s surprise, Rodriguez also landed on his feet.

CIA officials initially claimed that the videotapes were destroyed to protect the identity of the interrogators – read torturers. It was later revealed that then-Executive Director of the CIA, Kyle “Dusty” Foggo, wrote in an email that Rodriguez thought “the heat from destroying is nothing compared with what it would be if the tapes ever got into public domain,” adding that they would be “should devastating to us.”

Foggo ended up in prison as a result of an unrelated fraud case. Sadly, no

senior intelligence official following the time-(dis)honored Foggo/Rodriguez approach today are likely to end up behind bars, unless this time Congress shows unaccustomed courage.

**Ray McGovern works with the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. After retiring from a 27-year career as a CIA analyst, he co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

---

## ‘The Post’ and the Pentagon Papers

The new movie “The Post” tells the story of the Pentagon Papers from a curious perspective that ignores much of the drama of the real history, as James DiEugenio explains.

By James DiEugenio

Imagine a film about a backer of an American war in the Third World who, as a State Department official, decides to visit and observe that war firsthand. After many months he learns that most of what our leaders have been telling the public about the war was wrong. In reality, our side was not winning, and most of the claims made for the effort were false. For example, patrols reported to protect certain areas did not even exist. The written reports describing these patrols were simply made up. Therefore both American troops, and the foreign natives we were allied with, were dying by the thousands for fraudulent reasons.

When he returns from his tour abroad, the official learns about a secret Defense Department study. It exposes much of what he had observed. The study is being supervised by his old boss, who gives him access to it. He then meets with a politician who is against the war and they begin to share certain ideas about opposing it. That politician decides to run for president in order to end the war. But he is assassinated while on the verge of winning his party’s nomination. As a result, a new president takes office, yet he is not that interested in ending what has now become a continuing disaster. In fact, the new president actually expands combat operations into two neighboring countries.

The former hawk has now become a dove dedicated to ending the war. He decides his only option is to copy the secret study since it shows all the deceptions and failures of the war. He goes to Washington and offers it to four anti-war politicians to read on the floor of Congress. They all have reasons to refuse.

He then decides to go to an old reporter friend who, like him, went from backing

the war to opposing it. His newspaper decides to publish a long series based on the secret study. But on the third day of publication, the new president goes to court to stop publication. So our protagonist goes to an old acquaintance at a rival newspaper, and that paper decides to publish. They are also sued but our converted dove gets copies to many other papers, nearly twenty in all. They all publish. And he finally finds a senator to read the documents into the congressional record. The new president charges him for theft and espionage. But the president's administration uses several unethical means in order to indict him—including influencing the judge with a job offer. These acts are publicized and the charges dismissed. He becomes a household name and, quite rightly, a national hero.

Who wouldn't want to see a movie based on that story? Who wouldn't like to be part of making a movie based on that story?

Well, evidently, Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg wouldn't. Instead, they have produced a movie, "The Post," depicting a very different set of events.

Those first few paragraphs describe the ordeal that Daniel Ellsberg went through in order to expose what came to be known as the Pentagon Papers. By copying those secret documents and disseminating them to an array of newspapers, Ellsberg and his friend Anthony Russo risked going to prison for a combined 150 years.

Russo did go to jail for refusing to testify against Ellsberg. Their trial went on for several weeks in Los Angeles in 1973. But while in process, it was revealed by the Watergate prosecutor that the FBI had illegally wiretapped Ellsberg, that the White House had sent burglars to break into the office of his psychiatrist, and that President Richard Nixon and his domestic aide John Ehrlichman had offered their judge, Matt Byrne, the directorship of the FBI while the trial was proceeding. As a result of these abuses, the charges against Ellsberg and Russo were dismissed.

All of this, and much more, is profusely detailed in Ellsberg's 2002 book, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*. That book provides the scaffolding for a gripping story full of both epic and personal drama. In the 457 pages of Ellsberg's fine book, *Washington Post* executive editor Ben Bradlee is mentioned exactly once, on page 392. Katharine Graham, the owner and publisher of the *Post*, is not mentioned at all. But it is upon Bradlee and Graham that Hanks and Spielberg decided to base their film about the Pentagon Papers.

## **Ellsberg and the Times**

Yet, in naming the film "The Post," Hanks and Spielberg even distort who should get credit for breaking the Pentagon Papers in the press. As noted above, Ellsberg had gone to four politicians in Washington and asked them to insert the voluminous Pentagon Papers study into the Congressional Record. He thought this would be the safest legal way for him to get the study out since the Constitution's free debate clause protects senators and congressman from being questioned for what they say on the floor. (ibid, p. 361) But, for various reasons, Senators George McGovern, William Fulbright, Charles Mathias, and representative Pete McCloskey, all turned him down.

It was at this point that Ellsberg got in contact with a man he had met while he was in Vietnam, *New York Times* reporter Neil Sheehan. When first stationed in Vietnam, Sheehan—like his friend and colleague David Halberstam—had been a backer of the war. He and Halberstam were critical of President Kennedy's policies for not being aggressive enough and for not inserting American combat troops. (David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, pgs. 321-22) But once they saw that President Johnson's escalation had not worked, they began to have second thoughts about the expanded American involvement. By 1971, Sheehan was now seriously questioning his former beliefs about the war.

At this time, Ellsberg had a teaching fellowship at MIT, so the reporter drove up to Cambridge. He read some of the documents, and took some notes. He then told his editors at the *Times* about them. Ellsberg had given Sheehan a key to his apartment on a weekend he was not there and—unawares to Ellsberg—Sheehan copied the Pentagon Papers and brought them to New York. (Ellsberg, p. 375)

One of the hidden heroes of the Pentagon Papers case at this point stepped forward. James Goodale was the general counsel for the *Times*. In March of 1971, he had been tipped off that the newspaper might be coming into possession of a large amount of classified information. In the next three months he and his assistant studied all of the legal issues involved and predicted the possible ways President Nixon could halt publication through prior restraint.

He then looked at the stories the *Times* wanted to run. This included one on how Johnson had used false information about the Tonkin Gulf incident in 1964 to pass a congressional resolution to wage war against North Vietnam. Goodale predicted the administration would use the Pentagon Papers as a way to continue Nixon's and Vice President Spiro Agnew's war against the press. He then mapped out the defenses the *Times* would be able to utilize to neutralize the administration's attack.

Goodale's legal analysis was remarkably prescient: it was the issues he studied in March that decided the case for the *Times* in June. (Goodale, *Fighting for the Press*, pgs. 41-43) Once the *Times* had the documents there was a debate at the

higher levels of management over whether to publish. Managing editor Abe Rosenthal threatened to resign if they did not. And it was the threat of mass resignations that convinced Punch Sulzberger, owner of the *Times*, to publish. But once that decision was made, the *Times'* conservative Republican law firm deserted them. Therefore, on the eve of trial, it was Goodale who put together an ad hoc defense team, literally overnight. (ibid, p. 71) It was that team—which included Yale professor Alexander Bickel and Floyd Abrams at the firm of Cahill Gordon—which argued the first hearings over the Pentagon Papers case in New York.

### **The Post Gets Involved**

Contrary to what the Hanks/Spielberg film depicts, after the first day of publication—June 13, 1971—Nixon did not fly into a rage. After all, the Pentagon Papers stopped in 1968, before Nixon was elected. The stories by the *New York Times* had focused on the escalations during the Johnson administration. On that first day, White House Counsel Charles Colson had advised Nixon not to overreact, and he did not. (Steve Sheinkin, *Most Dangerous*, p. 217)

There were two people who reversed Nixon's position. The first was Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Advisor. Kissinger had known Ellsberg from his days at Harvard. When Nixon took office, Ellsberg had consulted Kissinger on various options for the war from his position at Rand Corporation. (Ellsberg, pgs. 231-34) Kissinger knew about the Pentagon Papers and he suspected almost immediately that Ellsberg had given them to the *Times*. On the second day of publication, Kissinger talked to Bob Haldeman, Nixon's Chief of Staff. He told him the president now had to act, for there was a wholesale subversion of the government going on. He then told Nixon that the stories somehow made him look like a weakling. (Sheinkin, p. 221)

Nixon asked Attorney General John Mitchell for an opinion on the issue. Mitchell, who had been a bond lawyer in New York, gave Nixon some poor legal advice. He told the president that the government had sued to stop a newspaper from publishing before. And it was customary to give the paper notice of such legal action. (Goodale, p. 73) This information was completely wrong. Such an act—legally called prior restraint—had never happened before in America. The reason being that, in the United States, unlike in Great Britain, there is no Official Secrets Act to justify stopping publication before the information is printed.

Goodale knew this from his research. Therefore, when Mitchell forwarded a telegram to the *Times*, Goodale advised them not to obey the request to stop publishing. Mitchell then went into court to apply for a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) on the grounds that the series was causing irreparable harm to



national security. This was granted in New York by a newly appointed judge named Murray Gurfein. In the meantime, Nixon enlisted some friends—Maxwell Taylor, John Tower, Averill Harriman—to begin attacking the *New York Times*. (ibid, p. 85)

It is only at this point, a year into Ellsberg's struggle to make the Pentagon Papers public, that the *Washington Post* entered the picture. And it did not happen the way the film depicts it. For example, Ben Bradlee never sent a spy to infiltrate the *New York Times* office; therefore that fictitious spy never saw a mock up with a front page with Sheehan's name on it.

As Ellsberg writes in *Secrets*, he had never planned on going to the *Washington Post*. Dunn Gifford, a friend of Sheehan's—who is completely absent from the film—first suggested he go to the *Post*. Ellsberg wrote that, on his own, he never would have thought of the *Post* himself. (We will speculate as to why that was later, see Ellsberg pgs. 388-89.) But it was at this point, with the Justice Department's TRO in place, the *Times* going a day without publishing, with Gifford urging him to go elsewhere to keep the current moving, that Ellsberg, through a friend, called journalist Ben Bagdikian, who worked for the *Washington Post*. (ibid, p. 391)

### **Dramatic License**

The problems the film has with dramatic license, which, as we shall see, are going to get worse, owe to three interwoven facts. First was the decision by the screenwriters—Liz Hannah and Josh Singer—to tell the story through the *Washington Post*. In turn, that choice left them with paltry source material. And that owes to the fact that the *Post* only figured in the story for about two weeks. Yet, as we will see, the saga of the Pentagon Papers extended to well over two years.

The primary sources for the screenplay amount to Katharine Graham's book *Personal History*, Ben Bradlee's autobiography *A Good Life*, and Bradlee's authorized biography written by Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in Truth*. Those three narratives do not differ very much in information. And the longest of the three is Graham's, which totals a miniscule 12 pages. One dramatic problem is that Graham and Bradlee never really acted to attain a goal. They are acted upon, are therefore reacting to external events: the *Times* story, Mitchell's TRO, Ellsberg and Gifford's discussions. To work their way out of this dramatic problem the writers created Bradlee's ersatz spy and, as we shall see, some other confections.

But there is also a different use of dramatic license that creeps into the story. These deal with the reasons the *Post* wanted the story in the first

place. Throughout the film Bradlee is portrayed as some kind of crusader for both truth and the right to free speech for the press. Later in the film, to further this angle, the script fabricates another scene. Towards the end, when Graham is deciding whether or not to print the documents—her lawyers have advised her not to—she walks in to talk to Robert McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense. This scene was manufactured—there is no evidence for it in any book on the case. And it is fabricated for two apparent reasons. First, to somehow convey that Graham was surprised at what had happened in Vietnam under McNamara's direction, and second, to show McNamara trying to talk Graham out of printing the Pentagon Papers.

For anyone who knows the Pentagon Papers case and the history of the *Washington Post*, there is no other way to say it: this scene is an insulting fairy tale. Robert McNamara actually commissioned the Pentagon Papers study back in 1967. In order to ensure that it was objective and scholarly he deliberately did not exercise any influence over it during the 18 months it took to complete. The chain of command in the writing and editing of this valuable encyclopedia were from McNamara's deputy John McNaughton, to McNaughton's assistant Morton Halperin.

Halperin appointed research analyst Leslie Gelb to supervise various teams to write the individual chapters. According to Gelb, he never had any difficulty getting documents once he invoked McNamara's name. One of the reasons that McNamara wanted the study classified Top Secret was so his boss, Lyndon Johnson, would not find out about it. McNamara knew LBJ would terminate it. (Sheinkin, p. 125) In other words, without McNamara, there would have been no Pentagon Papers. And there is no evidence of him ever trying to stop any of that record from being published.

Second, the idea that Kay Graham was surprised at the revelations in the Pentagon Papers also does not jibe with the record. When Graham took control of the *Washington Post* in 1964, President Johnson immediately began a full court press to gain her trust and favor. One of the reasons for this was that he wanted to have her and the *Post* in his corner as he began to escalate the war.

Anyone who witnessed the 1964 presidential race between GOP candidate Barry Goldwater and Johnson will recall that Johnson painted Goldwater as the extreme Vietnam hawk while saying that he would not send American boys to do what Asian boys should and also that "We seek no wider war." (Joseph Goulden, *Truth is the First Casualty*, pgs 38, 164) As Frederick Logevall showed in his book *Choosing War*, this was a deliberate deception. At the very least, by the summer of 1964, Johnson had started planning on direct American intervention in the war. (See Logevall, pgs 128-30) This would be done by the escalated bombing of the north

and, later, through the insertion of combat troops. The target date was February of 1965. Johnson missed it by one month: both began in March.

Are we somehow to believe that Graham did not hear Johnson make the pledges he did in the 1964 race? Was she then blind to the air escalation through Operation Rolling Thunder, and the eventual 540,000 combat troops in theater by 1968? And somehow she did not notice the difference? There were neither combat troops in theater nor any Rolling Thunder over Vietnam on the day John F. Kennedy was killed.

The truth is that, as more than one Kay Graham biographer has shown, Johnson's charm offensive paid off in spades. In fact, in April of 1964, LBJ invited Graham and the executives of the *Post* to lunch at the White House. In the family dining room, he asked for their support for his planned expansion of the war in Indochina. (Carol Felsenthal, *Power, Privilege and the Post*, p. 234) In other words, Graham knew Johnson was lying as he hit the campaign trail. In spite of that, the *Post* endorsed his attacks on North Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August of 1964. (ibid) In fact, the *Post* went further. They blasted the two senators who voted against the Tonkin Gulf resolution. The paper wrote that it was false to equate the resolution to a declaration of war. In fact, that is what Johnson used it for. (ibid, p. 304)

There was never any wavering of the *Post's* support through Johnson's milestone escalations of 1965. As one observer said of Graham, "She liked being respectable, and was very uneasy about being different from the norm." (ibid, p. 239) This extended to letting Johnson have assistants call her and ask for modifications to stories about the war. At times Graham would invite the whole upper level of the State Department to dinner, knowing that Dean Rusk was an unmitigated hawk. (ibid, p. 240) LBJ sent her on a tour to Vietnam where she met with General Westmoreland. Upon her return, she asked her editorial board if anyone thought they should bring up the question of withdrawal. When one writer said he did, she replied, "You're so stupid." (ibid, p. 241)

As Johnson's escalations continued into 1966, the *Times* began to be at least a bit critical of some elements. For instance, they criticized civilian casualties in the bombing of Hanoi. The *Post* defended the bombing and criticized the *Times*, comparing their story to "those in communist propaganda leaflets." (ibid, p. 255) The *Post* then criticized Martin Luther King when he spoke out against the war in 1967. (ibid, p. 256)

### **The Post Joins the 'Big League'**

But perhaps the strongest indication of just how far the *Post* would go in backing Johnson's massive escalation of the war occurred in 1968. Ward Just had

been the main *Post* reporter in Vietnam. He never questioned the causes of the war, or whether America should be there. But he was an honest and accurate reporter who tried to portray things as they were without spinning them.

The problem was that after the Tet offensive, any kind of realism made Johnson and the war effort look pretty bad. Johnson and Westmoreland's light at the end of the tunnel had grown dark. So Bradlee now switched out Just and replaced him with Peter Braestrup. Like Johnson, Braestrup argued that the Tet offensive was really a failure for Hanoi and a military victory for America. In fact, he went on to write a very long book defending that bizarre thesis. (Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, p. 173) This record may explain why Ellsberg never thought of giving the documents to the *Washington Post*.

That record made me cringe at another scene near the end. At the Supreme Court hearing in Washington, Graham is walking into the building alone. A young Hispanic legal assistant shows her a side door to get into the hearing room. While walking through the corridor she thanks Graham since she had a brother in Vietnam. Understanding Graham and the *Post*—which the script does not want us to do—it was Graham's support for that war that helped put her brother in Vietnam. If one needed any more convincing of how this picture spins the facts, all one needs to know is that Graham supported Nixon's re-election. This is not only after the Pentagon Papers case, but after the *Post's* initial coverage of the Watergate break in. (Robin Lerber, *Katharine Graham* p. 134)

Therefore, what was the reason that the *Post* was so eager to publish the Pentagon Papers? It was quite simply a matter of Bradlee's overweening ambition. Graham even admitted this. She later recalled that Bradlee "was driven crazy by the *Times* having this enormous and important material." (Felsenthal, p. 299) Bradlee's overarching goal once he got into an editorship position at the *Post* was to make it the equal of the *New York Times*. In other words, when those in power talked about the "paper of record", he wanted to alter that discussion to the "papers of record" so that the *Post* would have the same kind of imprimatur as the Grey Lady. Bradlee himself admitted this was the case.

He later said that the Pentagon Papers was a key moment for the *Post*. Not because what was in the documents, and not for any impact it would have on the war. But because it meant that the *Post* had graduated into what, for him, was the highest ranks of American journalism. Referring to himself and Graham, he said: "One of our unspoken goals was to get the world to refer to the *Post* and the *NYT* in the same breath, which they previously had not done. After the Pentagon Papers, they did." (Graham, *Personal History*, p. 458) Or to put it in football terms, as Bradlee was wont to do, "The score was 36-0 and we were trying to get even." (Sanford Ungar, *The Papers and the Papers*, p. 131)

Probably the worst scene in the film comes after Attorney General Mitchell has secured a TRO against the *Washington Post*. Therefore, after two days, the *Post* had to halt publication and await the outcome of the Supreme Court decision. Journalist Ben Bagdikian comes into Bradlee's office and places a tall grocery bag on his desk. He then says something like: I always wanted to be part of a rebellion. Bradlee looks into the bag and then carries it to Graham's office. There he starts taking out the other newspapers that have now published the Pentagon Papers. Editor and publisher jubilantly celebrate.

Again, there is no evidence that this scene happened. What really occurred was that, after his conversation with Dunn Gifford, Ellsberg decided that he had better start making multiple copies of the documents. Therefore, on a staggered basis, he would then parcel them out to other interested newspapers. Once they were enjoined, he would give them to another paper. All told there were four papers that Mitchell decided to sue. In addition to the *Times* and *Post*, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and the *Boston Globe* were also enjoined. But the documents, through Ellsberg's support group, kept on getting out, up to and even past the Supreme Court decision. (Ungar, p. 190) The idea that somehow these newspapers were inspired by Graham, or empowered by her, is simply false. It was Ellsberg who empowered them at his own personal risk. Just as he originally empowered the *Times* and the *Post*. The Hanks/Spielberg version excises that key fact.

### **A 'Feel Good' Fairytale**

Because the film was directed by Spielberg, it is quite skillfully made. He has almost always been a visually acute director. But he has also said about himself that—unlike Alfred Hitchcock or Michelangelo Antonioni—he really does not have a visual style. He added that he saw his function as serving the writer's intent, therefore adapting his style to the material. He does a nice job of that here.

The montage sequence where the *Post* gets out its first-day story based on the Pentagon Papers is a well shot and paced paragraph of action: going from the copy desk to the delivery trucks. The scene with Graham in her den deciding to publish the documents surrounded with differing opinions by her business and editorial advisors is shot from above, conveying the idea that powerful forces are pressuring her into a fateful decision. The penultimate scene with Graham and Bradlee in the printing room after the court decided in their favor, and they can now publish again, is nicely composed: the camera pulling back until the two characters are dwarfed by the image and sound of the printing press getting the Pentagon Papers out.

Meryl Streep is Kay Graham. She delivers her usual studied, technically sound, precisely prepared performance. My only problem with her acting is that the character is written as if this was Graham's first day on the job. At this

point, Graham had been in charge of the paper for eight years. The idea that she was just finding her way into her position is hard to swallow. To say that Tom Hanks plays Bradlee would be a misleading statement. Streep does what Hanks does not do: she uses her mental and emotional powers to create someone else. Hanks is—for all intents and purposes—Hanks, not Bradlee. With one exception, the rest of the characters seem cast on appearances: They look like board members or cub reporters. That one exception is *Breaking Bad's* Bob Odenkirk who shows some genuine acting range in his portrayal of Ben Bagdikian.

As mentioned, in 1967-68 Ellsberg had gotten close to a presidential candidate who agreed with him about the war, but who was assassinated before the November election of 1968. That candidate was, of course, Robert Kennedy. Kennedy wanted Ellsberg to be his main advisor on Vietnam. In fact, in his book, Ellsberg hints that it was Kennedy who gave some documents to the *New York Times* which helped prevent another escalation by Johnson after Tet. And during his presidential campaign, Ellsberg worked on a speech for RFK about Vietnam. (Ellsberg, pgs. 203, 218) When he got the news Kennedy had been killed, Ellsberg broke down and cried for a half hour. He then wrote, "I loved Bobby. He was the only politician I ever felt that way about." (ibid, p. 220) But because the film marginalizes Ellsberg, this important and moving aspect of the story is nowhere on the screen.

And neither is the senator who actually did read the Pentagon Papers on the floor of the senate, which made the Supreme Court decision all but inconsequential as far as their publication went. That senator was Mike Gravel of Alaska. He started to read the documents late on the night before the Supreme Court decision was announced. After about four hours, he nearly collapsed and moved to place them into the record. (Ungar, p. 262) He had timed it so his subcommittee would be absent and consequently there could be no objections to his motion. It was that stenographic record which produced the first privately published version of the Pentagon Papers, named after Gravel, from Beacon Press in Massachusetts.

After the Supreme Court ruled for the *Times* and *Post*, Nixon and Mitchell did not give up. They opened a grand jury proceeding in Massachusetts to go after Ellsberg, Gravel and Beacon Press. This failed because of the debate privilege enjoyed by all senators speaking from the floor. (ibid, p. 284) But they did indict Ellsberg and Anthony Russo in California, where Rand was located. Russo went to prison for seven weeks on contempt charges for refusing to testify against Ellsberg. He did so even though he was granted immunity in return for his testimony. (ibid, p. 273) Mitchell charged Ellsberg with eleven counts, which carried a maximum jail time of 115 years, or life in prison. Russo was charged with three counts, which carried a maximum of 35 years in prison.

Unlike what the film tries to convey, it was this trial that was directly impacted by Watergate. Because the Watergate prosecution uncovered the illegal electronic surveillance of Ellsberg, the burglary at his psychiatrist's office, and the attempt by Nixon to influence Judge Matt Byrne by offering him the FBI directorship while the trial was proceeding. Because of those acts, the charges were dismissed. (Ellsberg, pgs. 444-449)

"The Post" tries to imply that the publication of the Pentagon Papers caused Watergate. As new research by writers like Robert Parry and Ken Hughes has shown, such was not the case. What caused the creation of the Plumbers Unit in the White House was Nixon's fear that hidden documents would expose his interference in the 1968 election through Anna Chennault and officials in Saigon. That effort sandbagged Johnson's 1968 peace efforts and helped Nixon defeat Hubert Humphrey.

As the reader can see, "The Post" does not come close to telling the full story about the Pentagon Papers, or the perfidy of the Nixon administration in trying to prevent their publication. And what it does present is—in this reviewer's opinion—seriously slanted. If Hanks and Spielberg were really interested in history, the only way to do this story justice would have been through a four-part mini-series. That would have made for both honest and genuine history, but also for more dramatic visuals.

Cinematically, the best parts of "The Post" are the early scenes in Vietnam and the heisting and copying of the Pentagon Papers. But in addition, that approach would have allowed for the introduction of legendary characters like General Ed Lansdale and Colonel Jean Paul Vann, since Ellsberg met and served under both in Vietnam. We then could have later met others that Ellsberg encountered like Kissinger and McGovern and RFK. But that kind of presentation—with Ellsberg asking Kissinger in public how many civilians he and Nixon planned on killing in Indochina in one year, not knowing that Nixon had already told Kissinger he did not care about civilian deaths—that would have produced a much harder edged film than this one. (Ellsberg, pgs. 353-54, 419)

Instead, Hanks and Spielberg have given us a combination Washington/Hollywood fairy tale. A "feel good" film that works only for those who are unaware of the underlying facts, which they and their screenwriters have truncated and altered to produce their desired effect. The best thing I can say about this film is that it could provoke the viewer to get the real story by reading Ellsberg's book *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is Reclaiming Parkland.**

---

# Haiti and America's Historic Debt

**From the Archive:** President Trump says his “tough” language on immigration, which reportedly included decrying “shithole” nations, didn’t apply to Haiti but he appears to know little of America’s debt to Haiti, which Robert Parry described in 2010.

By Robert Parry (First published on Jan.13, 2010)

In 2010, when announcing emergency help for Haiti after a devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake, President Barack Obama noted America’s historic ties to the impoverished Caribbean nation, but few Americans understand how important Haiti’s contribution to U.S. history was.

In modern times, when Haiti does intrude on U.S. consciousness, it’s usually because of some natural disaster or a violent political upheaval, and the U.S. response is often paternalistic, if not tinged with a racist disdain for the country’s predominantly black population and its seemingly endless failure to escape cycles of crushing poverty.

However, more than two centuries ago, Haiti represented one of the most important neighbors of the new American Republic and played a central role in enabling the United States to expand westward. If not for Haiti, the course of U.S. history could have been very different, with the United States possibly never expanding much beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

In the 1700s, then-called St. Domingue and covering the western third of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti was a French colony that rivaled the American colonies as the most valuable European possession in the Western Hemisphere. Relying on a ruthless exploitation of African slaves, French plantations there produced nearly one-half the world’s coffee and sugar.

Many of the great cities of France owe their grandeur to the wealth that was extracted from Haiti and its slaves. But the human price was unspeakably high. The French had devised a fiendishly cruel slave system that imported enslaved Africans for work in the fields with accounting procedures for their amortization. They were literally worked to death.

The American colonists may have rebelled against Great Britain over issues such as representation in Parliament and arbitrary actions by King George III. But black Haitians confronted a brutal system of slavery. An infamous French method



of executing a troublesome slave was to insert a gunpowder charge into his rectum and then detonate the explosive.

So, as the American colonies fought for their freedom in the 1770s and as that inspiration against tyranny spread to France in the 1780s, the repercussions would eventually reach Haiti, where the Jacobins' cry of "liberty, equality and fraternity" resonated with special force. Slaves demanded that the concepts of freedom be applied universally.

When the brutal French plantation system continued, violent slave uprisings followed. Hundreds of white plantation owners were slain as the rebels overran the colony. A self-educated slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as the revolution's leader, demonstrating skills on the battlefield and in the complexities of politics.

Despite the atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict, the rebels known as the "Black Jacobins" gained the sympathy of the American Federalist Party and particularly Alexander Hamilton, a native of the Caribbean himself and a fierce opponent of slavery. Hamilton, the first U.S. Treasury Secretary, helped L'Ouverture draft a constitution for the new nation.

## **Conspiracies**

But events in Paris and Washington soon conspired to undo the promise of Haiti's new freedom. Despite Hamilton's sympathies, some Founders, including Thomas Jefferson who owned 180 slaves and owed his political strength to agrarian interests, looked nervously at the slave rebellion in St. Domingue. Jefferson feared that slave uprisings might spread northward.

"If something is not done, and soon done," Jefferson wrote in 1797, "we shall be the murderers of our own children."

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the chaos and excesses of the French Revolution led to the ascendance of Napoleon Bonaparte, a brilliant and vain military commander possessed of legendary ambition. As he expanded his power across Europe, Napoleon also dreamed of rebuilding a French empire in the Americas.

In 1801, Jefferson became the third President of the United States and his interests at least temporarily aligned with those of Napoleon. The French dictator was determined to restore French control of St. Domingue and Jefferson was eager to see the slave rebellion crushed.

Through secret diplomatic channels, Napoleon asked Jefferson if the United States would help a French army traveling by sea to St. Domingue. Jefferson replied that "nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with

everything and reduce Toussaint [L'Ouverture] to starvation."

But Napoleon had a secret second phase of his plan that he didn't share with Jefferson. Once the French army had subdued L'Ouverture and his rebel force, Napoleon intended to advance to the North American mainland, basing a new French empire in New Orleans and settling the vast territory west of the Mississippi River.

In May 1801, Jefferson picked up the first inklings of Napoleon's other agenda. Alarmed at the prospect of a major European power controlling New Orleans and thus the mouth of the strategic Mississippi River, Jefferson backpedaled on his commitment to Napoleon, retreating to a posture of neutrality. Still terrified at the prospect of a successful republic organized by freed African slaves Jefferson took no action to block Napoleon's thrust into the New World.

In 1802, a French expeditionary force achieved initial success against the slave army, driving L'Ouverture's forces back into the mountains. But, as they retreated, the ex-slaves torched the cities and the plantations, destroying the colony's once-thriving economic infrastructure.

L'Ouverture, hoping to bring the war to an end, accepted Napoleon's promise of a negotiated settlement that would ban future slavery in the country. As part of the agreement, L'Ouverture turned himself in. Napoleon, however, broke his word.

Jealous of L'Ouverture, who was regarded by some admirers as a general with skills rivaling Napoleon's, the French dictator had L'Ouverture shipped in chains back to Europe where he was mistreated and died in prison.

### **Foiled Plans**

Infuriated by the betrayal, L'Ouverture's young generals resumed the war with a vengeance. In the months that followed, the French army already decimated by disease was overwhelmed by a fierce enemy fighting in familiar terrain and determined not to be put back into slavery.

Napoleon sent a second French army, but it too was destroyed. Though the famed general had conquered much of Europe, he lost 24,000 men, including some of his best troops, in St. Domingue before abandoning his campaign. The death toll among the ex-slaves was much higher, but they had prevailed, albeit over a devastated land.

By 1803, a frustrated Napoleon denied his foothold in the New World agreed to sell New Orleans and the Louisiana territories to Jefferson. Ironically, the Louisiana Purchase, which opened the heart of the present United States to American settlement, had been made possible despite Jefferson's misguided

collaboration with Napoleon.

Jefferson also saw the new territory as an opportunity to expand slavery in the United States, creating a lucrative new industry of slave-breeding that would financially benefit Jefferson and his plantation-owning neighbors. But nothing would be done to help Haiti. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Thomas Jefferson: America's Founding Sociopath](#)."] ]

"By their long and bitter struggle for independence, St. Domingue's blacks were instrumental in allowing the United States to more than double the size of its territory," wrote Stanford University professor John Chester Miller in his book, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*.

But, Miller observed, "the decisive contribution made by the black freedom fighters went almost unnoticed by the Jeffersonian administration."

The loss of L'Ouverture's leadership dealt a severe blow to Haiti's prospects, according to Jefferson scholar Paul Finkelman of Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

"Had Toussaint lived, it's very likely that he would have remained in power long enough to put the nation on a firm footing, to establish an order of succession," Finkelman told me in an interview. "The entire subsequent history of Haiti might have been different."

Instead, the island nation continued a downward spiral. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the radical slave leader who had replaced L'Ouverture, formally declared the nation's independence and returned it to its original Indian name, Haiti. A year later, apparently fearing a return of the French and a counterrevolution, Dessalines ordered the massacre of the remaining French whites on the island.

Though the Haitian resistance had blunted Napoleon's planned penetration of the North American mainland, Jefferson reacted to the shocking bloodshed in Haiti by imposing a stiff economic embargo on the island nation. In 1806, Dessalines himself was brutally assassinated, touching off a cycle of political violence that would haunt Haiti for the next two centuries.

### **Jefferson's Blemish**

For some scholars, Jefferson's vengeful policy toward Haiti like his personal ownership of slaves represented an ugly blemish on his legacy as a historic advocate of freedom. Even in his final years, Jefferson remained obsessed with Haiti and its link to the issue of American slavery.

In the 1820s, the former President proposed a scheme for taking away the

children born to black slaves in the United States and shipping them to Haiti. In that way, Jefferson posited that both slavery and America's black population could be phased out. Eventually, in Jefferson's view, Haiti would be all black and the United States white.

Jefferson's deportation scheme never was taken very seriously and American slavery would continue for another four decades until it was ended by the Civil War. The official hostility of the United States toward Haiti extended almost as long, ending in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln finally granted diplomatic recognition.

By then, however, Haiti's destructive patterns of political violence and economic chaos had been long established continuing up to the present time. Personal and political connections between Haiti's light-skinned elite and power centers of Washington also have lasted through today.

Recent Republican administrations have been particularly hostile to the popular will of the impoverished Haitian masses. When leftist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was twice elected by overwhelming margins, he was ousted both times first during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and again under President George W. Bush.

Washington's conventional wisdom on Haiti holds that the country is a hopeless basket case that would best be governed by business-oriented technocrats who would take their marching orders from the United States.

However, the Haitian people have a different perspective. Unlike most Americans who have no idea about their historic debt to Haiti, many Haitians know this history quite well. The bitter memories of Jefferson and Napoleon still feed the distrust that Haitians of all classes feel toward the outside world.

"In Haiti, we became the first black independent country," Aristide once told me in an interview. "We understand, as we still understand, it wasn't easy for them American, French and others to accept our independence."

**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](#)).**

---

---

# Giving War Too Many Chances

As the new year begins, it is important for the U.S. to acknowledge its troubling history of global war-making, especially over the past two-decades, as Nicolas J.S. Davies delineates.

By Nicolas J.S. Davies

I met John Lennon and Yoko Ono on Christmas Eve in 1969. I joined them and a small group of local peace activists in a Christmas fast for world peace in front of Rochester Cathedral in England, a short walk from where I lived with my family in Chatham Dockyard. I was 15 years old, and my father was the dockyard medical officer, responsible for the health and safety of the dockyard workers who maintained the U.K.'s new fleet of nuclear submarines.

John and Yoko arrived before midnight mass. We were all introduced and went in for the service. By the time we came out, thousands of people had heard John was there. He was still a Beatle and he was mobbed by a huge crowd, so he and Yoko decided they couldn't stay with us as planned. While most of our little group helped John back to their iconic white Rolls Royce, I and another boy not much older than me were left to shepherd a panicking Yoko back through the crowd to the car. They both made it, and we never saw them again. The next morning a florist came by with a huge box of white carnations, and we spent the rest of our Christmas and Boxing Day handing flowers to passers-by and getting to know each other – the birth of what became the Medway and Maidstone Peace Action Group.

While the U.K. was not openly involved in the Vietnam War, it was deeply involved in the Cold War and the nuclear arms race, and watching the U.K.'s closest ally destroy Vietnam led many of my generation to question the Cold War assumptions about "good guys" and "bad guys" that we'd been raised on. John and Yoko became the de facto leaders of the peace movement, and their song "Give Peace a Chance" was a simple unifying anthem.

After two world wars, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War, we all wanted peace, but it seemed to be the one thing our leaders were not willing to try, claiming that the Cold War justified an endless arms race, and wars and coups wherever U.S. and British leaders thought they'd spotted a Red under somebody's bed. That included many countries whose experiments with socialism were less advanced than in the U.K., where I grew up with a cradle to grave healthcare system, free education through university, a comprehensive welfare state and state-owned utilities, railways and major industries.

**The peace dividend vs the power dividend**

Once the Cold War ended, the justification for 50 years of massive military spending, global warfare and coups was finally over. Like U.S. allies, enemies and neighbors around the world, Americans breathed a sigh of relief and welcomed the “peace dividend.” Robert McNamara and Lawrence Korb, former cold warriors of both parties, testified to the Senate Budget Committee that the U.S. military budget could be cut in half from its FY1990 level over the next 10 years.

Committee chairman Senator Jim Sasser hailed “this unique moment in history” as “the dawn of the primacy of domestic economics.”

But the peace dividend was short-lived, trumped by what Carl Conetta of the Project for Defense Alternatives has dubbed the “power dividend,” the drive to exploit the end of the Cold War to consolidate and expand U.S. military power.

Influential voices linked to military industrial interests had a new refrain, essentially “Give War a Chance.” But of course, they didn’t put it so plainly:

– After the First Gulf War in 1991, President Bush I celebrated “kick(ing) the Vietnam syndrome,” and deployed U.S. pilots directly from Kuwait to the Paris Air Show to cash in on the marketing value of a war that had just killed tens of thousands of people in Iraq. The next 3 years set a new record for U.S. arms sales. The Pentagon later admitted that only 7% of the bombs and missiles dropped on Iraq were the “precision-guided” ones they showcased to TV viewers, and only 41% to 60% of those “precision” weapons hit their targets anyway. Iraq was ruthlessly carpet bombed, but we were sold a high-tech dog and pony show.

– Despite surely being well aware of the reality behind the propaganda, Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz crowed to General Wesley Clark, “With the end of the Cold War, we can now use our military with impunity.”

– As the Clinton administration took over the reins of the U.S. war machine in 1992, Madeleine Albright challenged General Colin Powell on his “Powell Doctrine” of limited war, asking him, “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”

– Albright was appointed Secretary of State in 1997, mainstreaming new political pretexts for otherwise illegal wars such as “humanitarian intervention” and the “responsibility to protect.” But despite the steady diet of war propaganda, Albright was drowned out by protests from the audience when she threatened war on Iraq at a town hall meeting in Columbus in 1998.

– Clinton’s 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review declared, “When the interests at stake are vital... we should do whatever it takes to defend them, including, when necessary, the unilateral use of military power. U.S. vital national interests include, but are not limited to... preventing the emergence of a hostile regional coalition... (and) ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and

strategic resources.” But as the U.K. Foreign Office’s senior legal adviser told his government during the Suez crisis in 1956, “The plea of vital interest, which has been one of the main justifications for wars in the past, is indeed the very one which the UN Charter was intended to exclude as a basis for armed intervention in another country.”

– After a failed CIA coup in 1996 betrayed every CIA agent in Iraq to the Iraqi government, precluding a second coup attempt, the newly formed neoconservative Project for the New American Century began pushing for war on Iraq. The 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, threatening “regime change” through the use of military force, passed Congress with only 38 Nays in the House and unanimous consent in the Senate.

– When U.K. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told Albright his government was having trouble “with our lawyers” over NATO’s illegal plan to attack Yugoslavia and annex Kosovo, she told him it should just “get new lawyers.”

– Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations a few weeks before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 2000, Hillary Clinton derided recent U.S. wars in Panama, Kuwait and Yugoslavia as “splendid little wars” and called for what a banking executive in the audience described as a “new imperialism.”

– Samantha Power popularized the idea that the use of U.S. military force could have prevented the genocide in Rwanda, an assumption challenged by experts on genocide (see “A Solution From Hell”) but which has served ever since as a powerful political argument for the U.S. uses of military force.

## **Afghanistan**

After pleading with the American people to “Give War a Chance” for a decade, U.S. political leaders seized on the crimes of September 11th, 2001 to justify an open-ended “global war on terror.”

Many Americans approved of attacking Afghanistan as an act of self defense, but of course it was not Afghanistan or the Taliban that committed the crimes of September 11th. As former Nuremberg prosecutor Ben Ferencz told NPR at the time, “It is never a legitimate response to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done. If you simply retaliate en masse by bombing Afghanistan, let us say, or the Taliban, you will kill many people who don’t approve of what has happened.”

Sixteen years later, 16,500 U.S. troops soldier on through the graveyard of empires, while U.S. warplanes have dropped 3,852 bombs and missiles on Afghanistan since Mr. Trump took office. No serious study has been conducted to estimate how many hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been killed since 2001.

As Matthew Hoh wrote in his resignation letter as he quit his post as the U.S. Political Officer in Zabul Province in Afghanistan in 2009,

“The Pashtun insurgency, which is composed of multiple, seemingly infinite local groups, is fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies. ...I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul.”

Or as an Afghan taxi driver in Vancouver told me, “We defeated the Persians in the 18th century, the British in the 19th century and the Russians in the 20th. Now, with NATO, we’re fighting 29 countries at once, but we’ll defeat them too.” Who would doubt it?

Today, after 16 years of occupation by up to 100,000 U.S. troops, thousands of deadly “kill or capture” night raids by U.S. special operations forces and over 60,000 bombs and missiles dropped on Afghanistan on the orders of 3 U.S. presidents, the corrupt U.S.-backed government in Kabul governs less territory today than at any time since before the U.S. invasion.

The U.S. war on Afghanistan is the longest war in U.S. history. There must be U.S. troops in Afghanistan today whose fathers were fighting there 16 years ago. This isn’t giving war a chance. It’s giving it a blank check, in blood and money.

## **Iraq**

When President Bush II unveiled a “national security strategy” based on a flagrantly illegal doctrine of preemptive war in 2002, Senator Edward Kennedy called it a “call for 21st century imperialism that no other country can or should accept.” The rest of the world rejected the U.S. case for war on Iraq in the UN Security Council and 30 million people took to the streets in the largest global demonstrations in history. But the U.S. and U.K. invaded Iraq anyway.

The U.K.’s role in the invasion was thrown into limbo when Admiral Michael Boyce, the Chief of the Defense Staff, told his government he could not give orders to invade Iraq without written confirmation that it would be legal. It took Tony Blair and his cronies five full days of grappling with their legal advisers before one of them, Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, who was not even an international lawyer, was willing to contradict what he and all the U.K.’s legal advisers had consistently and repeatedly told their government, that the invasion of Iraq would be a criminal act of aggression.



Four days later, the U.S. and U.K. committed the war crime of the new century, unleashing a war that has killed a million innocent people and left Iraq mired in bloody violence and chaos for 14 years and counting.

When the people of Iraq rose in resistance to the illegal invasion and occupation of their country, the U.S. launched a bloody “counterinsurgency” campaign. As U.S. forces destroyed Fallujah and Ramadi, U.S. officials in Baghdad recruited, trained and ran Interior Ministry death squads who tortured and assassinated tens of thousands of men and boys to ethnically cleanse Baghdad and other areas on a sectarian basis.

The most recent U.S. atrocity in Iraq was the massacre of an estimated 40,000 civilians in Mosul by U.S., Iraqi, French and other “coalition” forces. The U.S.-led bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria has dropped 104,000 bombs and missiles since 2014, making it the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since the American War in Vietnam. Iraqi government death squads once again prowl through the ruins of Mosul, torturing and summarily executing anyone they identify as a suspected Islamic State fighter or sympathizer.

In Iraq, “Give war a chance” does not mean, “It didn’t work here. Let’s try it somewhere else.” It means, “Keep bombarding Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul and massacring their people over and over again until there is nothing left but rubble and graveyards.” That is why 9,123 U.S. troops remain deployed in a land of rubble and graveyards in the 15th year of an illegal war.

## **Somalia**

Independent Somalia was formed from the former colonies of British and Italian Somaliland in 1970. After initially investing in literacy and infrastructure, Said Barre and his government built the largest army in Africa, supported first by the U.S.S.R. and then by the U.S., as it waged a long war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden, an ethnically Somali region of Ethiopia. In 1991, Barre was ousted in a civil war and the central government collapsed. UN and U.S. military interventions failed to restore any kind of order and foreign troops were withdrawn in 1995.

For the next 11 years, a dozen warlords ruled small fiefdoms while the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the internationally recognized government, hunkered down in Baidoa, the sixth largest city. But the country was not as violent as some other parts of Africa. Somalia is an ancient society and some order was preserved by traditional systems of law and government, including a unique system of customary law called Xeer, which has existed and evolved in Somalia since the 7th century.

In 2006, these various local authorities came together and formed the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). With the support of one of the strongest warlords, they defeated other warlords, including ones backed by the CIA, in fierce fighting in the capital, Mogadishu, and soon controlled the southern half of the country.

People who knew Somalia well hailed the ICU as a hopeful development and tried to reassure the Bush administration that it was not a danger.

But the threat of peace breaking out in Somalia was too much for the “give war a chance” crowd to stomach. The U.S. backed an Ethiopian invasion, supported by U.S. air strikes and special operations forces, plunging Somalia back into violence and chaos that continues to this day. The Ethiopian invaders drove the ICU out of Mogadishu, and it split into factions, with some of its leaders going into exile and others forming new armed groups, not least Al-Shabaab [an offshoot of Al Qaeda], to resist the Ethiopian invasion.

After Ethiopia agreed to withdraw its forces in 2008, a coalition government was formed by TFG and ICU leaders but did not include Al-Shabaab, which by then controlled large areas of the country. The government has been fighting Al-Shabaab ever since, supported by an African Union force and currently at least 289 U.S. special operations forces and other U.S. troops. The government has made gains, but Al-Shabaab still controls some areas. As it has been pushed back militarily, Al-Shabaab has launched devastating terrorist attacks in Somalia and Kenya, where the U.S. now also has 212 troops deployed. Neighboring Djibouti hosts 4,715 U.S. troops at the largest U.S. base in Africa.

The U.S. is doggedly expanding its militarized counterterrorism strategy in Africa, with at least 7,271 U.S. troops in 47 countries as of September 30th.

But a new body of research has confirmed what independent analysts have long believed, that it is precisely these kind of operations that drive civilians into armed resistance in the first place. A recent survey of 500 African militants by the UN Development Program found that the “tipping-point” that decided 71% of them to join a group like Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram or Al Qaeda was the killing or detention of a family member or friend in U.S.-led or U.S.-model “counterterrorism” operations.

So the circular logic of U.S. counterterrorism policy uses the emergence and growth of groups like Al-Shabaab as a pretext to expand the operations that are fueling their growth in the first place, turning more and more civilians into combatants and their homes and communities into new U.S. battlefields, to “give war a chance” in country after country.

## **Honduras**

On June 28th 2009, President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras was woken in the early

hours of the morning by soldiers in combat gear bursting into his official residence. They hauled him away at gunpoint in his pajamas, bundled him into a car and onto a plane to Costa Rica. President Obama immediately called the coup a coup and reaffirmed that Zelaya was still the democratically-elected president of Honduras, appearing to adopt the same position as every government in Latin America, the European Union and the UN General Assembly.

But, in the coming days, as Hillary Clinton has since admitted, she went to work to push for a new election in Honduras that would, as she put it, "render the question of Zelaya moot," by making the coup against him a *fait accompli* and allowing the coup regime of Roberto Micheletti to organize the new election.

Despite Obama's statement and Wikileaks' release of cables in which the U.S. Ambassador also called this an illegal coup, the U.S. never officially recognized that a coup had taken place, avoiding the cut-off of military aid to the post-coup government that was required under U.S. federal law and any further action to restore the democratically-elected president. In the coming years, Honduras, which was already the murder capital of the world, became even more dangerous as labor organizers and activists of all stripes were killed with impunity by the post-coup government's death squads. Environmental activist Berta Cáceres' murder caused worldwide outrage, but she is one of hundreds of activists and organizers killed.

The role of Secretary Clinton and the U.S. government in consolidating the results of the coup in Honduras should be seen in the context of the U.S.'s dominant historic role in Honduras, the original "banana republic," 70% of whose exports are still sold to the United States. Honduras currently hosts 529 U.S. military personnel, far more than any other country in the Western hemisphere, and they are deeply embedded with the Honduran military which committed the coup.

In the 1980s, under Ambassador John Negroponte, who eventually became Director of National Intelligence, the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa reportedly hosted the largest CIA station in the world, from where the CIA ran its covert war against Nicaragua, death squads that killed even American nuns with impunity in El Salvador and an outright genocide in Guatemala. With this history of U.S. military and CIA involvement in Honduras, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the CIA was secretly involved in planning the coup against Zelaya.

The 2009 coup in Honduras has now come home to roost, as even the historically U.S.-controlled Organization of American States has demanded a rerun of the latest rigged election and Honduras's feared Cobra paramilitary police have refused to repress pro-democracy protesters. The opposition party, the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship, which appears to have won the most

votes in the election, is a coalition of left and right against the post-coup government. How far will Trump and the U.S. go to rescue Clinton's 2009 campaign in Honduras? Will it ask us to "give war another chance?"

## Yemen

From 897 (not a typo) until 1962, most of Yemen was ruled by the Zaidi Imams.

The Zaidis follow a branch of Shiite Islam, but in Yemen they coexist and worship in the same mosques as Sunnis. The Houthis, who rule most of Yemen today, are also Zaidis. The last Zaidi Imam was overthrown by a republican coup in 1962, but, with Saudi support, he fought a civil war until 1970. Yes, you read that right. In the 1960s, the Saudis backed the Zaidi royalists in the Yemeni civil war. Now they call the Zaidis apostates and Iranian stooges and are waging a genocidal war to bomb and starve them to death.

At the peak of the previous civil war, 70,000 Egyptian troops fought on the republican side in Yemen, but the 1967 Arab-Israeli War changed the priorities of Arab countries on both sides. In February 1968, royalist forces lifted their siege of Sana'a and the two sides began peace talks, which led to a peace agreement and international recognition of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1970.

Meanwhile, also in 1967, a popular armed rebellion forced the U.K. to withdraw from its colony in Aden, which formed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a Marxist state and Soviet ally. When the Cold War ended, the two Yemens merged to form a united Republic of Yemen in 1990. Ali Abdallah Saleh, the president of North Yemen since 1978, became president of the united Yemen and ruled until 2011.

Saleh's repressive government alienated many sectors of Yemeni society, and the Zaidi Houthis launched an armed rebellion in their northern homeland in 2004.

The Zaidis and other Shia Muslims make up about 45% of the population and Zaidis ruled the country for centuries, so they have always been a force to be reckoned with.

At the same time, the new Obama administration launched a campaign of cruise missile and drone strikes and special forces operations against the fledgling Al Qaeda faction in the country and increased military aid to Saleh's government.

A U.S. drone strike assassinated Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, and another strike two weeks later murdered his American son, 16-year-old Abdulrahman. Like militarized U.S. counterterrorism campaigns in other countries, U.S. attacks have predictably killed hundreds of civilians, fueling the growth of Al Qaeda in Yemen.

Arab Spring protests and political turmoil forced Saleh to resign in November

2011. His deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, was elected in February 2012 to head a unity government that would draw up a new constitution and organize a new election in two years. After Hadi failed to hold an election or step down as president, the Houthis invaded the capital in September 2014, placed him under house arrest and demanded that he complete the political transition.

Hadi and his government rejected the Houthis' demands and simply resigned in January 2015, so the Houthis formed a Revolutionary Council as an "interim authority." Hadi fled to Aden, his hometown, and then to Saudi Arabia, which launched a savage bombing campaign and naval blockade against Yemen on Hadi's behalf. The U.S. provides most of the weapons, munitions, satellite intelligence and in-air refueling and is a vital member of the Saudi-led coalition, but of course U.S. media and politicians downplay the U.S. role.

The Saudi-U.S. coalition's bombing campaign has killed at least ten thousand civilians, probably many more, while a naval blockade and the bombing of ports have reduced the population to a state of near-starvation. Hadi's forces have recaptured Aden and an area around it, but they have failed to defeat the Houthis in the rest of the country.

U.S.-made bombs keep hitting markets, hospitals and other civilian targets in Yemen. Western military trainers regard the Saudi armed forces as more or less untrainable, due mainly to Saudi Arabia's rigid class and tribal hierarchy. The officer corps, some of whom are members of the royal family, are beyond criticism, so there is no way to correct mistakes or enforce discipline. So Saudi pilots bomb indiscriminately from high altitude, and will keep doing so unless and until the U.S. stops selling them munitions and withdraws its military and diplomatic complicity in this genocidal war.

Aid agencies keep warning that millions of Yemenis are close to starvation, but neither Saudi nor U.S. officials seem to care. The normalization of war and the culture of apathy nurtured by 16 years of American wars that have killed millions of people in a dozen countries have left U.S. officials supremely cynical, but their cynicism will be tested in 2018 as the predictable results of this "made in the U.S.A." humanitarian catastrophe unfold. The U.S. propaganda machine will also be tested as it keeps trying to pin all the blame on the Saudis.

## **Libya**

Muammar Gaddafi was a favorite villain of the West and an ally of the U.S.S.R., Cuba, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, the PLO, the IRA and the Polisario Front in Western Sahara. Gaddafi created a unique form of direct democracy, and he used Libya's oil wealth to provide free healthcare and

education and to give Libya the 5th highest GDP per capita in Africa and the highest development rating in Africa on the UN's HDI index, which measures health and education as well as income.

Gaddafi also used Libya's wealth to fund projects to give African countries more control of their own natural resources, like a Libyan-funded factory in Liberia to manufacture and export tire grade rubber instead of raw rubber. He also co-founded the African Union in 2002, which he envisioned growing into a military alliance and a common market with a single currency.

Militant Islamists within the military tried but failed to assassinate Gaddafi in 1993. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), formed by Libyans who had fought with CIA- and Saudi-backed forces in Afghanistan, was paid by the U.K.'s MI6 intelligence agency and Osama Bin-Laden to also try to kill him in 1996.

The U.K. gave asylum to some of LIFG's members, most of whom settled among the large Libyan community in Manchester.

The U.K. banned LIFG in 2005 and confiscated its members' passports due to its links with Al Qaeda. But that all changed again in 2011, their passports were returned, and MI6 helped many of them travel back to Libya to join the "NATO rebels." One LIFG member, Ramadan Abedi, took his 16-year old son Salman with him to Libya. Six years later, Salman struck his own blow for his family's Islamist ideology, carrying out a suicide bombing that killed 23 young music fans at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in May 2017.

Western leaders' eagerness to overthrow Gaddafi led France, the U.K., the U.S. and their NATO and Arab royalist allies to exploit a UN Security Council Resolution that authorized the use of force to protect civilians in Libya to overthrow the government, rejecting an African Union initiative to resolve the crisis peacefully.

The UN resolution called for an "immediate ceasefire" in Libya, but also authorized a "no-fly zone," which became a pretext for bombing Libya's military and civilian infrastructure with 7,700 bombs and missiles, and secretly deploying CIA officers and British, French and Qatari special operations forces to organize and lead Libyan rebel forces on the ground.

Qatar's Chief of Staff, Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Atiya, told AFP, "We were among them and the numbers of Qataris on the ground were in the hundreds in every region. Training and communications had been in Qatari hands. Qatar... supervised the rebels' plans because they are civilians and did not have enough military experience. We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces."

Qatari forces were even spotted leading the final assault on Libya's Bab al-Aziziya military headquarters in Tripoli.

After taking Tripoli, NATO and its Libyan and Qatari allies cut off food, water and electricity to the people of Sirte and Bani Walid as they bombarded them for weeks. The combination of aerial, naval and artillery bombardment, starvation and thirst on these civilian populations made a final, savage mockery of UNSCR 1973's mandate to protect civilians.

Once the U.S. and its allies had destroyed Libya's government, they abandoned it to chaos and civil war that still rages on six years later. Two competing governments control different parts of the country, while local militias control many smaller areas. Since 2011, human rights groups have reported that thousands of black Libyans and sub-Saharan Africans have suffered arbitrary detention and appalling abuse at the hands of the Libyan militias that the U.S. and its allies helped to take over the country. News reports of Africans being sold in slave markets in Libya are only the latest outrage.

As Libya struggles to dig its way out of the endless chaos the U.S. and its allies plunged it into, the U.S. has more or less washed its hands of the crisis in Libya. In 2016, U.S. foreign aid to Libya was only \$27 million.

## **Syria**

The U.S. role in the civil war in Syria is a case study in how a CIA covert operation can fuel a conflict and destabilize a country to create pretexts for U.S. military intervention. The CIA began organizing the transport of fighters and weapons from Libya to Turkey in late 2011, as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were militarizing an uprising in Syria that grew out of Arab Spring protests earlier in the year. British and French special operations forces provided military training in Turkey, and the CIA managed the infiltration of fighters and the distribution of weapons across the Syrian border.

The Syrian government's repression contributed to the transition from peaceful protests to an armed uprising. But the primarily leftist groups that organized the political protests in 2011 were committed to opposing violence, sectarianism and foreign intervention. They have always blamed Syria's descent into war mainly on the foreign powers who supported the small Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and funneled more extreme foreign-based Islamist forces and thousands of tons of weapons into the country to ignite a full-scale civil war.

In 2012, as Kofi Annan tried to negotiate a ceasefire and a political transition in Syria, the U.S. and its allies poured in foreign fighters and heavier weapons and pledged even greater support to rebel forces at three Orwellian "Friends of Syria" conferences. One of these was timed to coincide with the date when Annan's ceasefire was to take effect, and their new pledges of weapons, money and support for the rebels were a flagrant move to undermine the ceasefire.

After Annan eventually got all sides to agree on a peace plan in Geneva on June 30th 2012, on the understanding that it would then be codified in a UN Security Council Resolution, the U.S. and its allies went back to New York and inserted new conditions and triggers for sanctions and military action in the resolution, leading to a Russian veto. Annan's Geneva Communique has been eclipsed by 5 more years of war and equally fruitless Geneva II, Geneva III and Geneva IV peace conferences.

Annan quit a month later and was characteristically guarded in his public statements. But UN officials told the Atlantic in 2013 that Annan blamed the U.S. government for the failure of his mission. "The U.S. couldn't even stand by an agreement that the Secretary of State had signed in Geneva," said one of Annan's closest aides. "He quit in frustration."

After shipping at least 2,750 tons of weapons from Libya to Turkey in 2011 and 2012, including howitzers, RPGs and sniper rifles, the CIA began scouring the Balkans for weapons left over from the wars in the 1990s that the Saudis and Qataris could buy to flood into Syria through Turkey and Jordan. They shipped in up to 8,000 tons of weapons on flights from Croatia by March 2013.

Since then, the Saudis have bought more weapons from 8 different Balkan countries, as well as 15,000 TOW anti-tank missiles directly from the U.S. for \$1.1 billion in December 2013. That was despite U.S. officials admitting as early as October 2012 that most of the weapons shipped into Syria had gone to "hardline Islamic jihadists." Investigators in the Balkans report that the Saudis made their largest purchases ever in 2015, including brand new weapons straight off the production line. Only 60% of these weapons had been delivered by early 2017, meaning that the flood of weapons will continue as long as the CIA keeps facilitating it and U.S. allies like Turkey and Jordan keep acting as conduits.

The main innovation in U.S. war-making under the Obama administration was a doctrine of covert and proxy war that avoided heavy U.S. casualties at the expense of a reliance on aerial bombardment, drone killings, a huge expansion of deadly special forces operations and the use of foreign proxy forces. In every case, this fueled the global explosion of violence and chaos unleashed by Bush, and the main victims were millions of innocent civilians in country after country.

U.S. support for Al Qaeda splinter groups like Jabhat al-Nusra (now rebranded Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) and Islamic State turned the U.S. "war on terror" on its head. Only ten years after September 11th, the U.S. was ready to support these groups to destabilize Libya and Syria, where the CIA was looking for pretexts for war and regime change. The U.S. only reverted to its "war on terror"



narrative after U.S. and allied support had built up these groups to the point that they could invade Iraq and take over its second largest city and a large swath of the country.

The U.S. covert proxy war in Syria led to the heaviest U.S. bombing campaign since Vietnam, which has reduced several cities in Iraq and Syria to rubble and killed tens of thousands of civilians; a civil war in Syria that has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians; and a refugee crisis that has overwhelmed U.S. allies in the Middle East and Europe. After 6 years of war, Syria remains fragmented and mired in chaos. The Syrian government has regained control of many areas, but the future remains very dangerous and uncertain for the people of Syria. The U.S. currently has at least 1,723 troops on the ground in Syria, without any legal basis to be there, as well as 2,730 in Jordan and 2,273 in Turkey.

## **Ukraine**

President Yanukovich of Ukraine was overthrown in a violent coup in February 2014. Originally peaceful protests in the Maidan, or central square, in Kiev had gradually become dominated by the extreme right-wing Svoboda Party and, since November 2013, by a shadowy new group called Right Sector. These groups displayed Nazi symbols, fought with police and eventually invaded the Ukrainian parliament building, prompting Yanukovich to flee the country.

On February 4th, 2014, leaked audio of a conversation between U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland revealed U.S. plans for a coup to remove Yanukovich and install U.S. favorite Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Prime Minister. Nuland and Pyatt used language like, “glue this thing,” “midwife this thing” and “we could land jelly side up on this thing if we move fast,” as well as the more widely reported “Fuck the EU,” who they didn’t expect to support their plan.

On February 18th, Right Sector led 20,000 protesters on a march to the parliament building. They attacked police with Molotov cocktails, stormed and occupied government buildings and the police attacked the protest camp in the Maidan. As running battles with the police continued over the next few days, an estimated 75 people were killed, including 10 police and soldiers. Mysterious snipers were reported firing from Philharmonic Hall and a hotel overlooking the Maidan, shooting at police and protesters.

Yanukovich and his government held meetings with opposition leaders, and the EU sent the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland to mediate the crisis.

On February 21st, Yanukovich agreed to hold new presidential and parliamentary elections before the end of the year.

But the protesters, now led by Svoboda and Right Sector, were not satisfied and took over the parliament building. Right Sector had broken into an armory in Lviv and seized assault rifles and pistols, and the police no longer resisted.

On February 22nd, the parliament failed to make a quorum (338 of 447 members), but the 328 members present voted to remove Yanukovich from office and hold a new election in May. Yanukovich issued defiant statements and refused to resign, then fled to Russia.

Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine refused to accept the results of the coup.

The Crimean parliament organized a referendum, in which 97% voted to leave Ukraine and rejoin Russia, which Crimea had been part of since 1783. As an administrative matter, Khrushchev had placed Crimea within the Ukrainian SSR in the 1950s, but when the USSR broke up, 94% of Crimeans voted to become an autonomous republic and 83% voted to keep dual Russian and Ukrainian citizenship.

Russia accepted the result of the referendum and now governs Crimea. The greatest dangers to Russia from the coup in Kiev were that Ukraine would join NATO and Russia would lose its most strategic naval base at Sevastopol on the Black Sea. NATO issued a declaration in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members of NATO." Also in 2008, Ukraine threatened not to renew the lease on the base at Sevastopol, which was due to expire in 2017, but it was eventually extended to 2042.

The UN has not recognized Russia's reintegration of Crimea, and the U.S. has called it a violation of international law. But given the history and autonomous status of Crimea, and the importance of Sevastopol to Russia, it was an understandable and predictable response to the illegal U.S.-planned coup in Ukraine. It is the height of hypocrisy for U.S. officials to suddenly pose as champions of international law, which U.S. policy has systematically ignored, violated and undermined since the 1980s.

Russian-speaking majorities in Eastern Ukraine also declared independence from Ukraine as the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and appealed for Russian support, which Russia has covertly provided, although the extent of it is hotly debated. There were also large protests against the coup in Odessa on the Black Sea, and 42 protesters were killed when a Right Sector mob attacked them and set fire to the Trades Union building where they took refuge.

With the Ukrainian military unable or unwilling to launch a civil war against its Russian-speaking compatriots in the East, the post-coup government recruited and trained a new "National Guard" to do so. It was soon reported that the Azov Battalion and other National Guard units were linked to Svoboda and Right Sector, and that they were still displaying Nazi symbols as they assaulted

Russian-speaking areas in Eastern Ukraine. In 2015, the Azov Battalion was expanded to a 1,000-strong Special Operations Regiment.

The civil war in Ukraine has killed more than 10,000 people. The Minsk agreements between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany in September 2014 and February 2015 established a tenuous ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons by both sides, but the political problems persist, fueling outbreaks of fighting.

The U.S. has now agreed to send Ukraine Javelin anti-tank missiles and other heavier weapons, which are likely to reignite heavier fighting and complicate political negotiations.

### **Giving Peace a Chance?**

Giving war a chance has not worked out well, to put it mildly, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Honduras, Yemen, Libya, Syria or Ukraine. All remain mired in violence and chaos caused by U.S. invasions, bombing campaigns, coups and covert operations. In every case, U.S. policy decisions have either made these countries' problems worse or are entirely responsible for the incredible problems afflicting them. Many of those decisions were illegal or criminal under U.S. and/or international law. The human cost to millions of innocent people is a historic tragedy that shames us all. In every case, the U.S. could have made different decisions, and in every case, the U.S. can still make different decisions.

As an American general once observed, "When the only tool you've got is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." The allocation of most of our federal budget to military spending both deprives the U.S. of other "tools" and creates political pressures to use the one we have already paid so much for, as implied in Albright's question to Powell in 1992.

In Mr. Trump's new national security strategy, he promised Americans that he will "preserve peace through strength." But the U.S. is not at peace today. It is a nation at war across the world. The U.S. has 291,000 troops stationed in 183 foreign countries, amounting to a global military occupation. It has deployed special operations troops on secret combat and training missions to 149 countries in 2017 alone. It has dropped 39,000 bombs and missiles on Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan since Trump took office, and the U.S.- and Iraqi-led assault on Mosul alone killed an estimated 40,000 civilians. Pretending we are at peace and vowing to preserve it by diverting more of our resources to the military industrial complex is not a national security strategy. It is an Orwellian deception taken straight from the pages of *1984*.

At the dawn of 2018, nobody could accuse the American public of not giving war a chance. We have let successive presidents talk us into war over each and every

international crisis, most of which were caused or fueled by U.S. aggression and militarism in the first place, in the belief that they may have finally found an enemy they can defeat and a war that will somehow make life better for somebody somewhere. But they haven't.

As we look forward to a new year, surely it is time to try something different and finally "Give Peace a Chance." My 15-year old self was willing to spend Christmas fasting on the cold steps of a church to do that in 1969. What can you do to give peace a chance in 2018?

**Nicolas J. S. Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on "Obama at War" in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama's First Term as a Progressive Leader*.**

---