

The War That Never Ends (for the U.S. Military High Command)

A preoccupation with the “win-ability” of the Vietnam War has persisted among U.S. military commanders who doggedly pursue the War on Terror, despite all indications of the disastrous reality of both conflicts, writes U.S. Army Major Danny Sjursen for TomDispatch.

By Danny Sjursen

Vietnam: it’s always there. Looming in the past, informing American futures.

A 50-year-old war, once labeled the longest in our history, is still alive and well and still being refought by one group of Americans: the military high command. And almost half a century later, they’re still losing it and blaming others for doing so.

Of course, the U.S. military and Washington policymakers lost the war in Vietnam in the previous century and perhaps it’s well that they did. The United States really had no business intervening in that anti-colonial civil war in the first place, supporting a South Vietnamese government of questionable legitimacy, and stifling promised nationwide elections on both sides of that country’s artificial border. In doing so, Washington presented an easy villain for a North Vietnamese-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgency, a group known to Americans in those years as the Vietcong.

More than two decades of involvement and, at the war’s peak, half a million American troops never altered the basic weakness of the U.S.-backed regime in Saigon. Despite millions of Asian deaths and 58,000 American ones, South Vietnam’s military could not, in the end, hold the line without American support and finally collapsed under the weight of a conventional North Vietnamese invasion in April 1975.

There’s just one thing. Though a majority of historians (known in academia as the “orthodox” school) subscribe to the basic contours of the above narrative, the vast majority of senior American military officers do not. Instead, they’re still refighting the Vietnam War to a far cheerier outcome through the books they read, the scholarship they publish, and (most disturbingly) the policies they continue to pursue in the Greater Middle East.

The Big Re-Write

In 1986, future general, Iraq-Afghan War commander, and CIA director David

Petraeus penned an article for the military journal *Parameters* that summarized his Princeton doctoral dissertation on the Vietnam War. It was a piece commensurate with then-Major Petraeus's impressive intellect, except for its disastrous conclusions on the lessons of that war. Though he did observe that Vietnam had "cost the military dearly" and that "the frustrations of Vietnam are deeply etched in the minds of those who lead the services," his real fear was that the war had left the military unprepared to wage what were then called "low-intensity conflicts" and are now known as counterinsurgencies. His takeaway: what the country needed wasn't less Vietnams but better-fought ones.

The next time, he concluded fatefully, the military should do a far better job of implementing counterinsurgency forces, equipment, tactics, and doctrine to win such wars.

Two decades later, when the next Vietnam-like quagmire did indeed present itself in Iraq, he and a whole generation of COINdinistas (like-minded officers devoted to his favored counterinsurgency approach to modern warfare) embraced those very conclusions to win the war on terror. The names of some of them – H.R. McMaster and James Mattis, for instance – should ring a bell or two these days. In Iraq and later in Afghanistan, Petraeus and his acolytes would get their chance to translate theory into practice. Americans – and much of the rest of the planet – still live with the results.

Like Petraeus, an entire generation of senior military leaders, commissioned in the years after the Vietnam War and now atop the defense behemoth, remain fixated on that ancient conflict. After all these decades, such "thinking" generals and "soldier-scholars" continue to draw all the wrong lessons from what, thanks in part to them, has now become America's *second* longest war.

Rival Schools

Historian Gary Hess identifies two main schools of revisionist thinking. There are the "Clausewitzians" (named after the nineteenth century Prussian military theorist) who insist that Washington never sufficiently attacked the enemy's true center of gravity in North Vietnam. Beneath the academic language, they essentially agree on one key thing: the U.S. military should have bombed the North into a parking lot.

The second school, including Petraeus, Hess labeled the "hearts-and-minders."

As COINdinistas, they felt the war effort never focused clearly enough on isolating the Vietcong, protecting local villages in the South, building schools, and handing out candy – everything, in short, that might have won (in the phrase of that era) Vietnamese hearts and minds.

Both schools, however, agreed on something basic: that the U.S. military should

have won in Vietnam.

The danger presented by either school is clear enough in the twenty-first century. Senior commanders, some now serving in key national security positions, fixated on Vietnam, have translated that conflict's supposed lessons into what now passes for military strategy in Washington. The result has been an ever-expanding war on terror campaign waged ceaselessly from South Asia to West Africa, which has essentially turned out to be perpetual war based on the can-do belief that counterinsurgency and advise-and-assist missions should have worked in Vietnam and can work now.

The Go-Big Option

The leading voice of the Clausewitzian school was U.S. Army Colonel and Korean War/Vietnam War vet Harry Summers, whose 1982 book, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, became an instant classic within the military.

It's easy enough to understand why. Summers argued that civilian policymakers – not the military rank-and-file – had lost the war by focusing hopelessly on the insurgency in South Vietnam rather than on the North Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. More troops, more aggressiveness, even full-scale invasions of communist safe havens in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, would have led to victory.

Summers had a deep emotional investment in his topic. Later, he would argue that the source of post-war pessimistic analyses of the conflict lay in “draft dodgers and war evaders still [struggling] with their consciences.” In his own work, Summers marginalized all Vietnamese actors (as would so many later military historians), failed to adequately deal with the potential consequences, nuclear or otherwise, of the sorts of escalation he advocated, and didn't even bother to ask whether Vietnam was a core national security interest of the United States.

Perhaps he would have done well to reconsider a famous post-war encounter he had with a North Vietnamese officer, a Colonel Tu, whom he assured that “you know you never beat us on the battlefield.”

“That may be so,” replied his former enemy, “but it is also irrelevant.”

Whatever its limitations, his work remains influential in military circles to this day. (I was assigned the book as a West Point cadet!)

A more sophisticated Clausewitzian analysis came from current National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster in a highly acclaimed 1997 book, *Dereliction of Duty*. He argued that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were derelict in failing to give President Lyndon Johnson an honest appraisal of what it would take to win, which meant that “the nation went to war without the benefit of effective military advice.”

He concluded that the war was lost not in the field or by the media or even on antiwar college campuses, but in Washington, D.C., through a failure of nerve by the Pentagon's generals, which led civilian officials to opt for a deficient strategy.

McMaster is a genuine scholar and a gifted writer, but he still suggested that the Joint Chiefs should have advocated for a more aggressive offensive strategy – a full ground invasion of the North or unrelenting carpet-bombing of that country. In this sense, he was just another “go-big” Clausewitzian who, as historian Ronald Spector pointed out recently, ignored Vietnamese views and failed to acknowledge – an observation of historian Edward Miller – that “the Vietnam War was a Vietnamese war.”

COIN: A Small (Forever) War

Another Vietnam veteran, retired Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Krepinevich, fired the opening salvo for the hearts-and-minders. In *The Army and Vietnam*, published in 1986, he argued that the NLF, not the North Vietnamese Army, was the enemy's chief center of gravity and that the American military's failure to emphasize counterinsurgency principles over conventional concepts of war sealed its fate. While such arguments were, in reality, no more impressive than those of the Clausewitzians, they have remained popular with military audiences, as historian Dale Andrade points out, because they offer a “simple explanation for the defeat in Vietnam.”

Krepinevich would write an influential 2005 *Foreign Affairs* piece, “How to Win in Iraq,” in which he applied his Vietnam conclusions to a new strategy of prolonged counterinsurgency in the Middle East, quickly winning over the *New York Times*'s resident conservative columnist, David Brooks, and generating “discussion in the Pentagon, CIA, American Embassy in Baghdad, and the office of the vice president.”

In 1999, retired army officer and Vietnam veteran Lewis Sorley penned the definitive hearts-and-minds tract, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*. Sorley boldly asserted that, by the spring of 1970, “the fighting wasn't over, but the war was won.”

According to his comforting tale, the real explanation for failure lay with the “big-war” strategy of U.S. commander General William Westmoreland. The counterinsurgency strategy of his successor, General Creighton Abrams – Sorley's knight in shining armor – was (or at least should have been) a war winner.

Critics noted that Sorley overemphasized the marginal differences between the two generals' strategies and produced a remarkably counterfactual work. It didn't matter, however. By 2005, just as the situation in Iraq, a country then

locked in a sectarian civil war amid an American occupation, went from bad to worse, Sorley's book found its way into the hands of the head of U.S. Central Command, General John Abizaid, and State Department counselor Philip Zelikow.

By then, according to the *Washington Post's* David Ignatius, it could also "be found on the bookshelves of senior military officers in Baghdad."

Another influential hearts-and-minds devotee was Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl. (He even made it onto *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.) His *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* followed Krepinevich in claiming that "if [Creighton] Abrams had gotten the call to lead the American effort at the start of the war, America might very well have won it." In 2006, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker "so liked [Nagl's] book that he made it required reading for all four-star generals," while the Iraq War commander of that moment, General George Casey, gave Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld a copy during a visit to Baghdad.

David Petraeus and current Secretary of Defense James Mattis, co-authors in 2006 of FM 3-24, the first (*New York Times*-reviewed) military field manual for counterinsurgency since Vietnam, must also be considered among the pantheon of hearts-and-minders. Nagl wrote a foreword for their manual, while Krepinevich provided a glowing back-cover endorsement.

Such revisionist interpretations would prove tragic in Iraq and Afghanistan, once they had filtered down to the entire officer corps.

Reading All the Wrong Books

In 2009, when former West Point history professor Colonel Gregory Daddis was deployed to Iraq as the command historian for the Multinational Corps – the military's primary tactical headquarters – he noted that corps commander Lieutenant General Charles Jacoby had assigned a professional reading list to his principal subordinates. To his disappointment, Daddis also discovered that the only Vietnam War book included was Sorley's *A Better War*. This should have surprised no one, since his argument – that American soldiers in Vietnam were denied an impending victory by civilian policymakers, a liberal media, and antiwar protestors – was still resonant among the officer corps in year six of the Iraq quagmire. It wasn't the military's fault!

Officers have long distributed professional reading lists for subordinates, intellectual guideposts to the complex challenges ahead. Indeed, there's much to be admired in the concept, but also potential dangers in such lists as they inevitably influence the thinking of an entire generation of future leaders. In

the case of Vietnam, the perils are obvious. The generals have been assigning and reading problematic books for years, works that were essentially meant to reinforce professional pride in the midst of a series of unsuccessful and unending wars.

Just after 9/11, for instance, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Richard Myers – who spoke at my West Point graduation – included Summers's *On Strategy* on his list. A few years later, then-Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker added McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty*. The trend continues today. Marine Corps Commandant Robert Neller has kept McMaster and added *Diplomacy* by Henry Kissinger (he of the illegal bombing of both Laos and Cambodia and war criminal fame). Current Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley kept Kissinger and added good old Lewis Sorley. To top it all off, Secretary of Defense Mattis has included yet another Kissinger book and, in a different list, Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*.

Just as important as which books made the lists is what's missing from them: none of these senior commanders include newer scholarship, novels, or journalistic accounts which might raise thorny, uncomfortable questions about whether the Vietnam War was winnable, necessary, or advisable, or incorporate local voices that might highlight the limits of American influence and power.

Serving in the Shadow of Vietnam

Most of the generals leading the war on terror just missed service in the Vietnam War. They graduated from various colleges or West Point in the years immediately following the withdrawal of most U.S. ground troops or thereafter: Petraeus in 1974, future Afghan War commander Stanley McChrystal in 1976, and present National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster in 1984. Secretary of Defense Mattis finished ROTC and graduated from Central Washington University in 1971, while Trump's Chief of Staff John Kelly enlisted at the tail end of the Vietnam War, receiving his commission in 1976.

In other words, the generation of officers now overseeing the still-spreading war on terror entered military service at the end of or after the tragic war in Southeast Asia. That meant they narrowly escaped combat duty in the bloodiest American conflict since World War II and so the professional credibility that went with it. They were mentored and taught by academy tactical officers, ROTC instructors, and commanders who had cut their teeth on that conflict. Vietnam literally dominated the discourse of their era – and it's never ended.

Petraeus, Mattis, McMaster, and the others entered service when military prestige had reached a nadir or was just rebounding. And those reading lists taught the young officers where to lay the blame for that – on civilians in

Washington (or in the nation's streets) or on a military high command too weak to assert its authority effectively. They would serve in Vietnam's shadow, the shadow of defeat, and the conclusions they would draw from it would only lead to twenty-first-century disasters.

From Vietnam to the War on Terror to Generational War

All of this misremembering, all of those Vietnam "lessons" inform the U.S. military's ongoing "surges" and "advise-and-assist" approaches to its wars in the Greater Middle East and Africa. Representatives of both Vietnam revisionist schools now guide the development of the Trump administration's version of global strategy. President Trump's in-house Clausewitzians clamor for – and receive – ever more delegated authority to do their damndest and what retired General (and Vietnam vet) Edward Meyer called for back in 1983: "a freer hand in waging war than they had in Vietnam." In other words, more bombs, more troops, and carte blanche to escalate such conflicts to their hearts' content.

Meanwhile, President Trump's hearts-and-minds faction consists of officers who have spent three administrations expanding COIN-influenced missions to approximately 70% of the world's nations. Furthermore, they've recently fought for and been granted a new "mini-surge" in Afghanistan intended to – in disturbingly Vietnam-esque language – "break the deadlock," "reverse the decline," and "end the stalemate" there. Never mind that neither 100,000 U.S. troops (when I was there in 2011) nor 16 full years of combat could, in the term of the trade, "stabilize" Afghanistan. The can-do, revisionist believers atop the national security state have convinced Trump that – despite his original instincts – 4,000 or 5,000 (or 6,000 or 7,000) more troops (and yet more drones, planes, and other equipment) will do the trick. This represents tragedy bordering on farce.

The hearts and minders and Clausewitzians atop the military establishment since 9/11 are never likely to stop citing their versions of the Vietnam War as the key to victory today; that is, they will never stop focusing on a war that was always unwinnable and never worth fighting. None of today's acclaimed military personalities seems willing to consider that Washington couldn't have won in Vietnam because, as former Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill McPeak (who flew 269 combat missions over that country) noted in the recent Ken Burns documentary series, "we were fighting on the wrong side."

Today's leaders don't even pretend that the post-9/11 wars will ever end. In an interview last June, Petraeus – still considered a sagacious guru of the Defense establishment – disturbingly described the Afghan conflict as "generational."

Eerily enough, to cite a Vietnam-era precedent, General Creighton Abrams predicted something similar. speaking to the White House as the war in Southeast

Asia was winding down. Even as President Richard Nixon slowly withdrew U.S. forces, handing over their duties to the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) – a process known then as “Vietnamization” – the general warned that, despite ARVN improvements, continued U.S. support “would be required indefinitely to maintain an effective force.” Vietnam, too, had its “generational” side (until, of course, it didn’t).

That war and its ill-fated lessons will undoubtedly continue to influence U.S. commanders until a new set of myths, explaining away a new set of failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, take over, possibly thanks to books by veterans of these conflicts about how Washington could have won the war on terror.

It’s not that our generals don’t read. They do. They just doggedly continue to read the wrong books.

In 1986, General Petraeus ended his influential Parameters article with a quote from historian George Herring: “Each historical situation is unique and the use of analogy is at best misleading, at worst, dangerous.” When it comes to Vietnam and a cohort of officers shaped in its shadow (and even now convinced it could have been won), “dangerous” hardly describes the results. They’ve helped bring us generational war and, for today’s young soldiers, ceaseless tragedy.

[Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author, expressed in an unofficial capacity, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.]

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Truth and Lives vs. Career and Fame

Exclusive: As President Trump considers sending more troops to Afghanistan, it’s worth recalling the modern U.S. dynamic of politicians and generals making misguided judgments about war, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Fifty years ago, I could have tried to stop the Vietnam War, but lacked the courage. On Aug. 20, 1967, we at CIA received a cable from Saigon containing documentary proof that the U.S. commander, Gen. William Westmoreland, and his deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams, were lying about their "success" in fighting the Vietnamese Communists. I live with regret that I did not blow the whistle on that when I could have.

(I wrote about this two years ago: "[The Lasting Pain from Vietnam Silence](#)," republished below.)

Why raise this now? Because President Donald Trump has surrounded himself with starry-eyed generals (or generals with their eyes focused on their careers). And he seems to have little inkling that they got their multiple stars under a system where the Army motto "Duty, Honor, Country" can now be considered as "quaint" and "obsolete" as the Bush-Cheney administration deemed the Geneva Conventions.

All too often, the number of ribbons and merit badges festooned on the breasts of U.S. generals these days (think of the be-medaled Gen. David Petraeus, for example) is in direct proportion to the lies they have told in saluting smartly and abetting the unrealistic expectations of their political masters (and thus winning yet another star).

In my apologia that follows, the concentration is on the crimes of Westmoreland and the generations of careerist generals who aped him. There is not enough space to describe (or even list) those sycophantic officers here.

There are, sadly, far fewer senior officers who were exceptions, who put the true interests of the country ahead of their own careers. The list of general officers with integrity – the extreme exceptions to the rule – is even shorter. Only three spring immediately to mind: two generals and one admiral, all three of them cashiered for doing their job with honesty. What they experienced was instructive and remains so to this day.

1-On February 25, 2003, three weeks before the attack on Iraq, **Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki** warned the Senate Armed Services Committee that post-war Iraq would require "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers." He was immediately ridiculed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, for having exaggerated the requirement. Shinseki retired a few months later.

2-**Army General David McKiernan** was cut from the same cloth. When President Barack Obama took office, McKiernan was running the war in Afghanistan. Even

before Obama's election, he had expressed himself openly and strongly against applying the benighted Iraq-style "surge" of forces to Afghanistan, emphasizing that Afghanistan is "a far more complex environment than I ever found in Iraq," where he had led U.S. ground forces.

"The word I don't use for Afghanistan is 'surge,'" McKiernan told a news conference on Oct. 1, 2008. He warned that a large, sustained military buildup would be necessary to achieve any meaningful success. Worse still for the Washington Establishment, McKiernan added a stunning "no-no" – he said to achieve anything approaching a satisfactory outcome would take a decade, perhaps 14 years. Imagine!

For his political bosses, that cautionary realism was too much. On May 11, 2009, the Defense Secretary whom Obama's predecessor bequeathed to him, Robert Gates, sacked McKiernan, who had been in command less than a year. Gates replaced him with the swashbuckling Gen. Stanley McChrystal, a protégé of Gen. (and later CIA Director) David Petraeus.

Now, more than eight years later – with the American death toll almost quadrupled since the start of the Obama administration (now exceeding 2,400), with a vastly greater death toll among Afghan civilians and with the U.S. military position even more precarious – President Trump is receiving advice to dispatch more U.S. troops.

3-Admiral William J. ("Fox") Fallon, one of the last Vietnam War veterans on active duty late into George W. Bush's administration, took over as chief of the Central Command on March 16, 2007. Fallon had already come under heavy criticism from the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute for not being hawkish enough.

Fallon had also been confronting Vice President Dick Cheney's desire to commit U.S. forces to another Mideast war, with Iran. As Fallon was preparing to take responsibility for U.S. forces in the region, he declared that a war with Iran "isn't going to happen on my watch," according to retired Army Col. Patrick Lang who told the Washington Post.

Fallon's lack of patience with yes-men turned out to be yet another bureaucratic black mark against him. Several sources have reported that Fallon was sickened by David Petraeus's earlier, unctuous pandering to ingratiate himself with Fallon, his superior (for all-too-short a time). Fallon is said to have been so turned off by all the accolades in a flowery introduction given him by Petraeus that he called him to his face "an ass-kissing little chicken-shit," adding, "I hate people like that."

Fallon lasted not quite a full year. On March 11, 2008, Gates announced the resignation of Fallon as CENTCOM Commander, but Fallon's resistance to a war on Iran bought enough time for the U.S. intelligence community to reach a consensus that Iran had stopped work on a nuclear bomb years earlier, thus removing President Bush's intended excuse for going to war.

A Troubling Message

Sadly, however, the message to aspiring military commanders from this history is that there is little personal gain in doing what's best for the American people and the world. The promotions and the prestige normally go to the careerists who bend to the self-aggrandizing realities of Official Washington. They are the ones who typically become esteemed "wise men," the likes of Gen. Colin Powell, who went with the political winds (from his days as a young officer in Vietnam through his tenure as Secretary of State).

Someone needs to tell President Trump what Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity told President George W. Bush in a memorandum for the President on February 5, 2003, immediately following Powell's deceptive testimony urging the United Nations' Security Council to support an invasion of Iraq. What we said then seems just as urgent now:

"[A]fter watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion beyond ... the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic."

And on the chance that President Trump remains tone-deaf to such advice, let me appeal to the consciences of those within the system who are privy to the kind of consequential deceit that has become endemic to the U.S. government. It is time to blow the whistle – now.

Take it from one who lives with regret from choosing not to step forward when it might have made a difference. Take it from Pentagon Papers truth-teller Daniel Ellsberg who often expresses regret that he did not speak out sooner.

Take it from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a passage ironically cited often by President Obama: "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now ... there **is** such a thing as being too late."

[Below is McGovern's article from May 1, 2015]

The Lasting Pain from Vietnam Silence

Exclusive: Many reflections on America's final days in Vietnam miss the point, pondering whether the war could have been won or lamenting the fate of U.S. collaborators left behind. The bigger questions are why did the U.S. go to war and why wasn't the bloodletting stopped sooner, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern reflects.

By Ray McGovern

Ecclesiastes says there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. The fortieth anniversary of the ugly end of the U.S. adventure in Vietnam is a time to speak and especially of the squandered opportunities that existed earlier in the war to blow the whistle and stop the killing.

While my friend Daniel Ellsberg's leak of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 eventually helped to end the war, Ellsberg is the first to admit that he waited too long to reveal the unconscionable deceit that brought death and injury to millions.

I regret that, at first out of naiveté and then cowardice, I waited even longer until my own truth-telling no longer really mattered for the bloodshed in Vietnam. My hope is that there may be a chance this reminiscence might matter now if only as a painful example of what I could and should have done, had I the courage back then. Opportunities to blow the whistle *in time* now confront a new generation of intelligence analysts whether they work on Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, ISIS or Iran.

Incidentally, on Iran, there was a very positive example last decade: courageous analysts led by intrepid (and bureaucratically skilled) former Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence Thomas Fingar showed that honesty can still prevail within the system, even when truth is highly unwelcome.

The unanimous intelligence community conclusion of a National Intelligence Estimate of 2007 that Iran had stopped working on a nuclear weapon four years earlier played a huge role in thwarting plans by President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney to attack Iran in 2008, their last year in office. Bush says so in his memoir; and, on that one point, we can believe him.

After a half-century of watching such things closely, this is the only time in my experience that the key judgment of an NIE helped prevent a catastrophic, unwinnable war. Sadly, judging from the amateurism now prevailing in Washington's opaque policymaking circles, it seems clear that the White House pays little heed to those intelligence officers still trying to speak truth to power.

For them I have a suggestion: Don't just wring your hands, with an "I did everything I could to get the truth out." Chances are you have *not* done all you

can. Ponder the stakes the lives ended too early; the bodies and minds damaged forever; the hatred engendered against the United States; and the long-term harm to U.S. national interests and think about blowing the whistle publicly to prevent unnecessary carnage and alienation.

I certainly wish I had done so about what I learned of the unconscionable betrayal by senior military and intelligence officers regarding Vietnam. More recently, I know that several of you intelligence analysts with a conscience wish you had blown the whistle on the fraud "justifying" war on Iraq. Spreading some truth around is precisely what you need to do now on Syria, Iraq, Ukraine and the "war on terror," for example.

I thought that by describing my own experience negative as it is and the remorse I continue to live with, I might assist those of you now pondering whether to step up to the plate and blow the whistle now, before it is again too late. So below is an article that I might call "Vietnam and Me."

My hope is to spare you the remorse of having to write, a decade or two from now, your own "Ukraine and Me" or "Syria and Me" or "Iraq and Me" or "Libya and Me" or "The War on Terror and Me." My article, from 2010, was entitled "How Truth Can Save Lives" and it began:

If independent-minded Web sites, like WikiLeaks or, say, Consortiumnews.com, existed 43 years ago, I might have risen to the occasion and helped save the lives of some 25,000 U.S. soldiers, and a million Vietnamese, by exposing the lies contained in just one SECRET/EYES ONLY cable from Saigon.

I need to speak out now because I have been sickened watching the herculean effort by Official Washington and our Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) to divert attention from the violence and deceit in Afghanistan, reflected in thousands of U.S. Army documents, by shooting the messenger(s), WikiLeaks and Pvt. Bradley Manning.

After all the indiscriminate death and destruction from nearly nine years of war, the hypocrisy is all too transparent when WikiLeaks and suspected leaker Manning are accused of risking lives by exposing too much truth. Besides, I still have a guilty conscience for what I chose NOT to do in exposing facts about the Vietnam War that might have saved lives.

The sad-but-true story recounted below is offered in the hope that those in similar circumstances today might show more courage than I was able to muster in 1967, and take full advantage of the incredible advancements in technology since then.

Many of my Junior Officer Trainee Program colleagues at CIA came to Washington

in the early Sixties inspired by President John Kennedy's Inaugural speech in which he asked us to ask ourselves what we might do for our country. (Sounds corny nowadays, I suppose; I guess I'll just have to ask you to take it on faith. It may not have been Camelot exactly, but the spirit and ambience were fresh, and good.)

Among those who found Kennedy's summons compelling was Sam Adams, a young former naval officer out of Harvard College. After the Navy, Sam tried Harvard Law School, but found it boring. Instead, he decided to go to Washington, join the CIA as an officer trainee, and do something more adventurous. He got more than his share of adventure.

Sam was one of the brightest and most dedicated among us. Quite early in his career, he acquired a very lively and important account, that of assessing Vietnamese Communist strength early in the war. He took to the task with uncommon resourcefulness and quickly proved himself the consummate analyst.

Relying largely on captured documents, buttressed by reporting from all manner of other sources, Adams concluded in 1967 that there were twice as many Communists (about 600,000) under arms in South Vietnam as the U.S. military there would admit.

Dissembling in Saigon

Visiting Saigon during 1967, Adams learned from Army analysts that their commanding general, William Westmoreland, had placed an artificial cap on the official Army count rather than risk questions regarding "progress" in the war (sound familiar?).

It was a clash of cultures; with Army intelligence analysts saluting generals following politically dictated orders, and Sam Adams aghast at the dishonesty, *consequential* dishonesty. From time to time I would have lunch with Sam and learn of the formidable opposition he encountered in trying to get out the truth.

Commiserating with Sam over lunch one day in late August 1967, I asked what could possibly be Gen. Westmoreland's incentive to make the enemy strength appear to be half what it actually was. Sam gave me the answer he had from the horse's mouth in Saigon.

Adams told me that in a cable dated Aug. 20, 1967, Westmoreland's deputy, Gen. Creighton Abrams, set forth the rationale for the deception. Abrams wrote that the new, higher numbers (reflecting Sam's count, which was supported by all intelligence agencies except Army intelligence, which reflected the "command position") "were in sharp contrast to the current overall strength figure of

about 299,000 given to the press.”

Abrams emphasized, “We have been projecting an image of success over recent months” and cautioned that if the higher figures became public, “all available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion.”

No further proof was needed that the most senior U.S. Army commanders were lying, so that they could continue to feign “progress” in the war. Equally unfortunate, the crassness and callousness of Abrams’s cable notwithstanding, it had become increasingly clear that rather than stand up for Sam, his superiors would probably acquiesce in the Army’s bogus figures. Sadly, that’s what they did.

CIA Director Richard Helms, who saw his primary duty quite narrowly as “protecting” the agency, set the tone. He told subordinates that he could not discharge that duty if he let the agency get involved in a heated argument with the U.S. Army on such a key issue in wartime.

This cut across the grain of what we had been led to believe was the prime duty of CIA analysts, to speak truth to power without fear or favor. And our experience thus far had shown both of us that this ethos amounted to much more than just slogans. We had, so far, been able to “tell it like it is.”

After lunch with Sam, for the first time ever, I had no appetite for dessert. Sam and I had not come to Washington to “protect the agency.” And, having served in Vietnam, Sam knew first hand that thousands upon thousands were being killed in a feckless war.

What to Do?

I have an all-too-distinct memory of a long silence over coffee, as each of us ruminated on what might be done. I recall thinking to myself; someone should take the Abrams cable down to the *New York Times* (at the time an independent-minded newspaper).

Clearly, the only reason for the cable’s SECRET/EYES ONLY classification was to hide deliberate deception of our most senior generals regarding “progress” in the war and deprive the American people of the chance to know the truth.

Going to the press was, of course, antithetical to the culture of secrecy in which we had been trained. Besides, you would likely be caught at your next polygraph examination. Better not to stick your neck out.

I pondered all this in the days after that lunch with Adams. And I succeeded in

coming up with a slew of reasons why I ought to keep silent: a mortgage; a plum overseas assignment for which I was in the final stages of language training; and, not least, the analytic work, important, exciting work on which Sam and I thrived.

Better to keep quiet for now, grow in gravitas, and live on to slay other dragons. Right?

One can, I suppose, always find excuses for not sticking one's neck out. The neck, after all, is a convenient connection between head and torso, albeit the "neck" that was the focus of my concern was a figurative one, suggesting possible loss of career, money and status not the literal "necks" of both Americans and Vietnamese that were on the line daily in the war.

But if there is nothing for which you would risk your career "neck" like, say, saving the lives of soldiers and civilians in a war zone your "neck" has become your idol, and your career is not worthy of that. I now regret giving such worship to my own neck. Not only did I fail the neck test. I had not thought things through very rigorously from a moral point of view.

Promises to Keep?

As a condition of employment, I had signed a promise not to divulge classified information so as not to endanger sources, methods or national security. Promises are important, and one should not lightly violate them. Plus, there are legitimate reasons for protecting some secrets. But were any of those legitimate concerns the real reasons why Abrams's cable was stamped SECRET/EYES ONLY? I think not.

It is not good to operate in a moral vacuum, oblivious to the reality that there exists a hierarchy of values and that circumstances often determine the morality of a course of action. How does a written promise to keep secret everything with a classified stamp on it square with one's moral responsibility to stop a war based on lies? Does stopping a misbegotten war not supersede a secrecy promise?

Ethicists use the words "supervening value" for this; the concept makes sense to me. And is there yet another value? As an Army officer, I had taken a solemn oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

How did the lying by the Army command in Saigon fit in with that? Were/are generals exempt? Should we not call them out when we learn of deliberate deception that subverts the democratic process? Can the American people make good decisions if they are lied to?

Would I have helped stop unnecessary killing by giving the *New York Times* the not-really-secret, SECRET/EYES ONLY cable from Gen. Abrams? We'll never know, will we? And I live with that. I could not take the easy way out, saying Let Sam Do It. Because I knew he wouldn't.

Sam chose to go through the established grievance channels and got the royal run-around, even after the Communist countrywide offensive at Tet in January-February 1968 proved beyond any doubt that his count of Communist forces was correct.

When the Tet offensive began, as a way of keeping his sanity, Adams drafted a caustic cable to Saigon saying, "It is something of an anomaly to be taking so much punishment from Communist soldiers whose existence is not officially acknowledged." But he did not think the situation at all funny.

Dan Ellsberg Steps In

Sam kept playing by the rules, but it happened that unbeknown to Sam Dan Ellsberg gave Sam's figures on enemy strength to the *New York Times*, which published them on March 19, 1968. Dan had learned that President Lyndon Johnson was about to bow to Pentagon pressure to widen the war into Cambodia, Laos and up to the Chinese border perhaps even beyond.

Later, it became clear that his timely leak together with another unauthorized disclosure to the *Times* that the Pentagon had requested 206,000 more troops prevented a wider war. On March 25, Johnson complained to a small gathering, "The leaks to the *New York Times* hurt us. We have no support for the war. I would have given Westy the 206,000 men."

Ellsberg also copied the Pentagon Papers the 7,000-page top-secret history of U.S. decision-making on Vietnam from 1945 to 1967 and, in 1971, he gave copies to the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other news organizations.

In the years since, Ellsberg has had difficulty shaking off the thought that, had he released the Pentagon Papers sooner, the war might have ended years earlier with untold lives saved. Ellsberg has put it this way: "Like so many others, I put personal loyalty to the president above all else above loyalty to the Constitution and above obligation to the law, to truth, to Americans, and to humankind. I was wrong."

And so was I wrong in not asking Sam for a copy of that cable from Gen. Abrams. Sam, too, eventually had strong regrets. Sam had continued to pursue the matter within CIA, until he learned that Dan Ellsberg was on trial in 1973 for releasing the Pentagon Papers and was being accused of endangering national security by revealing figures on enemy strength.

Which figures? The same old faked numbers from 1967! "Imagine," said Adams, "hanging a man for leaking faked numbers," as he hustled off to testify on Dan's behalf. (The case against Ellsberg was ultimately thrown out of court because of prosecutorial abuses committed by the Nixon administration.)

After the war drew down, Adams was tormented by the thought that, had he not let himself be diddled by the system, the entire left half of the Vietnam Memorial wall would not be there. There would have been no new names to chisel into such a wall.

Sam Adams died prematurely at age 55 with nagging remorse that he had not done enough.

In a letter appearing in the (then independent-minded) *New York Times* on Oct. 18, 1975, John T. Moore, a CIA analyst who worked in Saigon and the Pentagon from 1965 to 1970, confirmed Adams's story after Sam told it in detail in the May 1975 issue of *Harper's* magazine.

Moore wrote: "My only regret is that I did not have Sam's courage. The record is clear. It speaks of misfeasance, nonfeasance and malfeasance, of outright dishonesty and professional cowardice.

"It reflects an intelligence community captured by an aging bureaucracy, which too often placed institutional self-interest or personal advancement before the national interest. It is a page of shame in the history of American intelligence."

Tanks But No Thanks, Abrams

What about Gen. Creighton Abrams? Not every general gets the Army's main battle tank named after him. The honor, though, came not from his service in Vietnam, but rather from his courage in the early day of his military career, leading his tanks through German lines to relieve Bastogne during World War II's Battle of the Bulge. Gen. George Patton praised Abrams as the only tank commander he considered his equal.

As things turned out, sadly, 23 years later Abrams became a poster child for old soldiers who, as Gen. Douglas McArthur suggested, should "just fade away," rather than hang on too long after their great military accomplishments.

In May 1967, Abrams was picked to be Westmoreland's deputy in Vietnam and succeeded him a year later. But Abrams could not succeed in the war, no matter how effectively "an image of success" his subordinates projected for the media. The "erroneous and gloomy conclusions of the press" that Abrams had tried so hard to head off proved all too accurate.

Ironically, when reality hit home, it fell to Abrams to cut back U.S. forces in Vietnam from a peak of 543,000 in early 1969 to 49,000 in June 1972, almost five years after Abrams's progress-defending cable from Saigon. By 1972, some 58,000 U.S. troops, not to mention two to three million Vietnamese, had been killed.

Both Westmoreland and Abrams had reasonably good reputations when they started out, but not so much when they finished.

And Petraeus?

Comparisons can be invidious, but Gen. David Petraeus is another Army commander who has wowed Congress with his ribbons, medals and merit badges. A pity he was not born early enough to have served in Vietnam where he might have learned some real-life hard lessons about the limitations of counterinsurgency theories.

Moreover, it appears that no one took the trouble to tell him that in the early Sixties we young infantry officers already had plenty of counterinsurgency manuals to study at Fort Bragg and Fort Benning. There are many things one cannot learn from reading or writing manuals, as many of my Army colleagues learned too late in the jungles and mountains of South Vietnam.

Unless one is to believe, contrary to all indications, that Petraeus is not all that bright, one has to assume he knows that the Afghanistan expedition is a folly beyond repair. So far, though, he has chosen the approach taken by Gen. Abrams in his August 1967 cable from Saigon. That is precisely why the ground-truth of the documents released by WikiLeaks is so important.

Whistleblowers Galore

And it's not just the WikiLeaks documents that have caused consternation inside the U.S. government. Investigators reportedly are rigorously pursuing the source that provided the *New York Times* with the texts of two cables (of 6 and 9 November 2009) from Ambassador Eikenberry in Kabul. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Obama Ignores Key Afghan Warning.](#)"]

To its credit, even today's far-less independent *New York Times* published a major story based on the information in those cables, while President Barack Obama was still trying to figure out what to do about Afghanistan. Later the *Times* posted the entire texts of the cables, which were classified Top Secret and NODIS (meaning "no dissemination" to anyone but the most senior officials to whom the documents were addressed).

The cables conveyed Eikenberry's experienced, cogent views on the foolishness of the policy in place and, implicitly, of any eventual decision to double down on the Afghan War. (That, of course, is pretty much what the President ended up

doing.) Eikenberry provided chapter and verse to explain why, as he put it, "I cannot support [the Defense Department's] recommendation for an immediate Presidential decision to deploy another 40,000 here."

Such frank disclosures are anathema to self-serving bureaucrats and ideologues who would much prefer depriving the American people of information that might lead them to question the government's benighted policy toward Afghanistan, for example.

As the *New York Times*/Eikenberry cables show, even today's FCM (fawning corporate media) may sometimes display the old spunk of American journalism and refuse to hide or fudge the truth, even if the facts might cause the people to draw "an erroneous and gloomy conclusion," to borrow Gen. Abrams's words of 43 years ago.

Polished Pentagon Spokesman

Remember "Baghdad Bob," the irrepressible and unreliable Iraqi Information Minister at the time of the U.S.-led invasion? He came to mind as I watched Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell's chaotic, quixotic press briefing on Aug. 5 regarding the WikiLeaks exposures. The briefing was revealing in several respects. Clear from his prepared statement was what is bothering the Pentagon the most. Here's Morrell:

"WikiLeaks's webpage constitutes a brazen solicitation to U.S. government officials, including our military, to break the law. WikiLeaks's public assertion that submitting confidential material to WikiLeaks is safe, easy and protected by law is materially false and misleading. The Department of Defense therefore also demands that WikiLeaks discontinue any solicitation of this type."

Rest assured that the Defense Department will do all it can to make it unsafe for any government official to provide WikiLeaks with sensitive material. But it is contending with a clever group of hi-tech experts who have built in precautions to allow information to be submitted anonymously. That the Pentagon will prevail anytime soon is far from certain.

Also, in a ludicrous attempt to close the barn door after tens of thousands of classified documents had already escaped, Morrell insisted that WikiLeaks give back all the documents and electronic media in its possession. Even the normally docile Pentagon press corps could not suppress a collective laugh, irritating the Pentagon spokesman no end. The impression gained was one of a Pentagon Gulliver tied down by terabytes of Lilliputians.

Morrell's self-righteous appeal to the leaders of WikiLeaks to "do the right

thing” was accompanied by an explicit threat that, otherwise, “We shall have to compel them to do the right thing.” His attempt to assert Pentagon power in this regard fell flat, given the realities.

Morrell also chose the occasion to remind the Pentagon press corps to behave themselves or face rejection when applying to be embedded in units of U.S. armed forces. The correspondents were shown nodding docilely as Morrell reminded them that permission for embedding “is by no means a right. It is a privilege.” The generals giveth and the generals taketh away.

It was a moment of arrogance, and press subservience, that would have sickened Thomas Jefferson or James Madison, not to mention the courageous war correspondents who did their duty in Vietnam. Morrell and the generals can control the “embeds”; they cannot control the ether. Not yet, anyway.

And that was all too apparent beneath the strutting, preening, and finger waving by the Pentagon’s fancy silk necktie to the world. Actually, the opportunities afforded by WikiLeaks and other Internet Web sites can serve to diminish what few advantages there are to being *in bed* with the Army.

What Would I Have Done?

Would I have had the courage to whisk Gen. Abrams’s cable into the ether in 1967, if WikiLeaks or other Web sites had been available to provide a major opportunity to expose the deceit of the top Army command in Saigon? The Pentagon can argue that using the Internet this way is not “safe, easy, and protected by law.” We shall see.

Meanwhile, this way of exposing information that people in a democracy should know will continue to be sorely tempting, and a lot easier than taking the risk of being photographed lunching with someone from the *New York Times*.

From what I have learned over these past 43 years, supervening moral values can, and should, trump lesser promises. Today, I would be determined to “do the right thing,” if I had access to an Abrams-like cable from Petraeus in Kabul. And I believe that Sam Adams, if he were alive today, would enthusiastically agree that this would be the morally correct decision.

My article from 2010 ended with a footnote about the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence (SAII), an organization created by Sam Adams’s former CIA colleagues and other former intelligence analysts to hold up his example as a model for those in intelligence who would aspire to the courage to speak truth to power.

At the time there were seven recipients of an annual award bestowed on those who

exemplified Sam Adam's courage, persistence and devotion to truth. Now, there have been 14 recipients: Coleen Rowley (2002), Katharine Gun (2003), Sibel Edmonds (2004), Craig Murray (2005), Sam Provance (2006), Frank Grevil (2007), Larry Wilkerson (2009), Julian Assange (2010), Thomas Drake (2011), Jesselyn Radack (2011), Thomasingar (2012), Edward Snowden (2013), Chelsea Manning (2014), William Binney (2015).

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a close colleague of Sam Adams; the two began their CIA analyst careers together during the last months of John Kennedy's administration. During the Vietnam War, McGovern was responsible for analyzing Soviet policy toward China and Vietnam.

Making Trump an Endless War President

A politically embattled President Trump is under pressure to reverse his campaign promise to finally bring U.S. troops home and instead commit to open-ended wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, writes Gareth Porter for Middle East Eye.

By Gareth Porter

The two top national security officials in the Trump administration – Defense Secretary James Mattis and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster – are trying to secure long-term U.S. ground and air combat roles in the three long-running wars in the greater Middle East – Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Proposals for each of the three countries are still being developed, and there is no consensus, even between Mattis and McMaster, on the details of the plans. They will be submitted to Trump separately, with the plan for Afghanistan coming sometime before a NATO summit in Brussels on May 25.

But if this power play succeeds in one or more of the three, it could guarantee the extension of permanent U.S. ground combat in the greater Middle East for many years to come – and would represent a culmination of the “generational war” first announced by the George W. Bush administration.

It remains to be seen whether President Trump will approve the proposals that Mattis and McMaster have pushed in recent weeks. Judging from his position during the campaign and his recent remarks, Trump may well balk at the plans now being pushed by his advisers.

The plans for the three countries now being developed within the Trump administration encompass long-term stationing of troops, access to bases and the authority to wage war in these three countries. These are the primordial interests of the Pentagon and the U.S. military leadership, and they have pursued those interests more successfully in the Middle East (bureaucratically at least) than anywhere else on the globe.

U.S. military officials aren't talking about "permanent" stationing of troops and bases in these countries, referring instead to the "open-ended commitment" of troops. But they clearly want precisely that in all three.

Shifting Timetables

The George W. Bush administration and the Barack Obama administration both denied officially that they sought "permanent bases" in Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively. But the subtext in both cases told a different story. A Defense Department official testifying before Congress at the time admitted that the term had no real meaning, because the Pentagon had never defined it officially.

In fact, at the beginning of the negotiations with Iraq on the U.S. military presence in 2008, the U.S. sought access to bases in Iraq without any time limit. But the al-Maliki government rebuffed that demand and the U.S. was forced to agree to withdraw all combat forces in a strict timetable.

Despite efforts by the Pentagon and the military brass, including Gen. David Petraeus, to get the Obama administration to renegotiate the deal with the Iraqi government to allow tens of thousands of combat troops to stay in the country, the Iraqis refused U.S. demands for immunity from prosecution in Iraq, and the U.S. had to withdraw all its troops.

Now the regional context has shifted dramatically in favor of the U.S. military's ambitions. On one hand, the war against Islamic State (also known as ISIS) is coming to a climax in both Iraq and Syria, and the Iraq government recognizes the need for more U.S. troops to ensure that ISIS can't rise again; and in Syria, the division of the country into zones of control that depend on foreign powers is an overriding fact.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, growing Taliban power and control across the country is being cited as the rationale for a proposal to reverse the withdrawals of U.S. and NATO troops in recent years and to allow a limited return by U.S. forces to combat.

Now that Islamic State forces are being pushed out of Mosul, both the Trump administration and the Iraqi government are beginning to focus on how to ensure that the terrorists do not return. They are now negotiating on an agreement that

would station U.S. forces in Iraq indefinitely. And the troops would not be there merely to defeat ISIS, but to carry out what the war bureaucracies call “stabilization operations” – getting involved in building local political and military institutions.

Plans for Syria

The question of what to do about Syria is apparently the subject of in-fighting between Mattis and the Pentagon, on one hand, and McMaster at the National Security Council, on the other. The initial plan for the defeat of ISIS in Syria, submitted to Trump in February, called for an increase in the size of U.S. ground forces beyond the present level of 1,000.

But a group of officers who have worked closely with Gen. Petraeus on Iraq and Afghanistan, which includes McMaster, has been pushing a much more ambitious plan, in which thousands – and perhaps many thousands – of U.S. ground troops would lead a coalition of Sunni Arab troops to destroy Islamic State’s forces in Syria rather than relying on Kurdish forces to do the job.

Both the original plan and the one advanced by McMaster for Syria would also involve U.S. troops in “stabilization operations” for many years across a wide expanse of eastern Syria that would require large numbers of troops for many years. Both in its reliance on Sunni Arab allies and in its envisioning a large U.S. military zone of control in Syria, the plan bears striking resemblance to the one developed for Hillary Clinton by the Center for New American Security when she was viewed as the president-in-waiting.

Reversing Obama’s Afghan Policy

The Pentagon proposal on Afghanistan, which had not been formally submitted by Mattis as of this week, calls for increasing the present level of 8,400 US troops in Afghanistan by 1,500 to 5,000, both to train Afghan forces and to fight the Taliban. It also calls for resuming full-scale U.S. air strikes against the Taliban. Both policy shifts would reverse decisions made by the Obama administration.

Five past U.S. commanders in Afghanistan, including Petraeus, have publicly called for the U.S. to commit itself to an “enduring partnership” with the Afghan government. That means, according to their joint statement, ending the practice of periodic reassessments as the basis for determining whether the U.S. should continue to be involved militarily in the war, an idea that is likely part of the package now being formulated by Mattis.

But the problem with such a plan is that the U.S. military and its Afghan client government have now been trying to suppress the Taliban for 16 years. The longer

they have tried, the stronger the Taliban have become. The U.S. and NATO were not able to pressure the Taliban to negotiate with the government even when they had more than 100,000 troops in the country.

Committing the U.S. to endless war in Afghanistan would only reinforce the corruption, abuses of power and culture of impunity that Gen. Stanley A. McChystal acknowledged in 2009 were the primary obstacles to reducing support for the Taliban. Only the knowledge that the U.S. will let the Afghans themselves determine the country's future could shock the political elite sufficiently to change its ways.

Most political and national security elites as well as the corporate news media support the push to formalize a permanent U.S. presence in Afghanistan, despite the fact that national polls indicate that it is the most unpopular war in U.S. history with 80 percent of those surveyed in a CNN poll in 2013 opposing its continuation.

There are signs that Trump may reject at least the plans for Afghanistan and Syria. Only days after his approval of the missile strike on a Russian-Syrian airbase, Trump told Fox Business in an interview, "We're not going into Syria."

And White House spokesman Sean Spicer seemed to suggest this week that Trump was not enamored with the plan to spend many more years trying to "transform" Afghanistan. "There is a difference between Afghanistan proper and our effort to defeat ISIS," Spicer said

Despite Trump's love for the military brass, the process of deciding on the series of new initiatives aimed at committing the U.S. more deeply to three wars in the greater Middle East is bound to pose conflicts between the political interests of the White House and the institutional interests of the Pentagon and military leaders.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and winner of the 2012 Gellhorn Prize for journalism. He is the author of the newly published *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*. [This article originally appeared at Middle East Eye at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/pentagon-seeks-permanent-war-iraq-afghanist-an-and-syria-1080897678>.]

Trump Ponders Petraeus for Senior Job

Exclusive: President-elect Trump's promise to "drain the swamp" of Washington

seems forgotten – like so many political promises – as he meets with swamp creatures, such as disgraced Gen. David Petraeus, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

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

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

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

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

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

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

In early 2011 in Afghanistan, Petraeus shocked aides to then-President Hamid

Karzai after many children were burned to death in a “coalition” attack in northeastern Afghanistan by suggesting that Afghan parents may have burned their own children to exaggerate their claims of civilian casualties and discredit the U.S., reported The Washington Post, citing two participants at the meeting.

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

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

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

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

Military Incompetent Without Parallel

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

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

The Iraq “surge,” which Petraeus oversaw, was misrepresented in the corporate

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Surge? Or Splurge With Lives

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

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

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

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

But the truth is not something that thrives in either U.S. politics or media these days. Campaigning early this year in New Hampshire, then-presidential aspirant Jeb Bush gave a short partial-history lesson about his big brother’s attack on Iraq. Referring to the so-called Islamic State, Bush said, “ISIS didn’t exist when my brother was president. ‘Al Qaeda in Iraq’ was wiped out ... the surge created a fragile but stable Iraq. ...”

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

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

So, despite Jeb Bush’s attempted spin, the reality is that his brother’s

aggressive war in Iraq created both “Al Qaeda in Iraq” and its new incarnation, Islamic State.

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

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

Escaping a ‘Lost War’

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Senator McCain, I met with every divisional commander, General Casey, the corps

commander, General Dempsey, we all talked together. And I said, 'in your professional opinion, if we were to bring in more American troops now, does it add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq?' And they all said no.

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

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

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

It called for: "A change in the primary mission of U.S. Forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly... By the first quarter of 2008...all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq."

Rumsfeld's Known-Knowns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All Hail Petraeus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although Petraeus’s CIA tenure ended in disgrace in November 2012 when his dangerous liaison with Paula Broadwell was disclosed, his many allies in Official Washington’s powerful neocon community are now pushing him on President-elect Trump as the man to serve as Secretary of State.

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

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

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

Will Hillary Clinton Get Favored Treatment?

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton's private emails jeopardized the safety of undercover CIA officers, suggesting criminal charges, but the Obama administration might make an exception for the Democratic frontrunner, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is in a legal pickle over her careless email practices – in that she appears to have endangered national security secrets including the identity of covert CIA officers and done so for selfish reasons (personal convenience or keeping her documents out of reach of transparency laws).

The facts of the case would seem to merit criminal charges against her, since Clinton's situation is analogous to problems faced by other senior officials, including former CIA directors John Deutch and David Petraeus who were accused of mishandling classified information, Deutch by having secret material on his home computer and Petraeus for giving notebooks with highly sensitive information to his lover/biographer.

Deutch agreed to plead guilty to a misdemeanor but was preemptively pardoned by President Bill Clinton; Petraeus pled guilty to a misdemeanor in a plea deal that spared him from jail time and was widely criticized as excessively lenient, especially since the Obama administration had jailed lower-level officials, such as former CIA officer John Kiriakou, for similar violations.

In 2012, faced with a multiple count indictment, Kiriakou agreed to plead guilty to one count of violating the 1982 Intelligence Identities Protection Act for giving a reporter the phone number of a former CIA officer whose work for the spy agency was still classified. Though the reporter did not publish the ex-officer's name, Kiriakou was sentenced to 30 months in prison.

The Intelligence Identities Protection Act was also a factor in the "Plame-gate affair" in 2003 when officials of George W. Bush's administration disclosed the CIA identity of Valerie Plame as part of a campaign to discredit her husband, former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Wilson, who had challenged Bush's claims about Iraq seeking yellowcake uranium for a nuclear program, one of the falsehoods that was used to justify invading Iraq.

Right-wing columnist Robert Novak blew Plame's undercover identity but a special

prosecutor chose not to indict anyone, including Bush's aides, under the 1982 law. He did, however, convict Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, I. Lewis Libby, of obstructing justice. However, Bush commuted Libby's sentence so he avoided jail time.

The recent State Department Inspector General report makes clear that Clinton blithely disregarded safeguards designed to protect the most highly classified national security information and that she included on her unprotected email server the names of U.S. intelligence agents under cover.

In other words, there is legal precedent for Hillary Clinton to be charged in connection with her decision to handle her State Department emails through a personal server in her home in Chappaqua, New York, rather than through official government servers. But there's political precedent as well for the well-connected to be either slapped on the wrist or let off the hook.

A Biblical Warning

Beyond Clinton's legal predicament over secrets, there is also the question of how she manipulates information on small matters as well as big. There's a pertinent Bible quotation: "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities." (Luke 16:10)

And I happen to have personal experience with how Clinton has been dishonest in the little matter of my brutal arrest on Feb. 15, 2011, after I stood with my back turned toward her while she delivered a speech at George Washington University about the importance of respecting dissent (in other countries, that is).

I have looked closely at her relevant email exchanges from late February 2011 after Secretary Clinton didn't miss a syllable as I was roughly dragged away by security personnel right in front of her. From my review of those emails, I had two take-aways: (1) Secretary Clinton is not truthful about the smallest of things; and (2) she had a much more important issue to worry about at the time; namely, rallying support for a "no-fly zone" as a gateway to a "regime change" war on Libya.

Could that be why she never took up her confidant Sidney Blumenthal's suggestion that an apology to me might be in order? Since the emails speak so eloquently to both issues, I will cite them below:

On my standing silently at George Washington U. on Feb. 15, 2011:

From: sbwhoeop [Sidney Blumenthal]

To: H (Hillary Clinton)

Sent: Fri Feb 18, 09:27:25, 2011

Subject: H: FYI, an unfortunate incident. Sid

"Don't know if you are aware of this unfortunate incident described below on Larry Johnson's website. Ray McGovern, a former CIA officer who gave the daily brief for President George H.W. Bush, is pretty well known in the intelligence community. He's become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness. Whatever his views, he's harmless. Something bad happened at your speech at GW. And it's become a minor cause celebre on the Internet among lefties. You might have someone check this out and also have someone apologize to Ray McGovern. Sid"

From Sidney Blumenthal (continued)

"Larry C. Johnson is a former analyst at the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, who moved subsequently in 1989 to the U.S. Department of State, where he served four years as the deputy director for transportation security, antiterrorism assistance training, and special operations in the State Department's Office of Counterterrorism. He left government ... in October 1993 ... and is an expert in the fields of terrorism, aviation security, and crisis and risk management, and money laundering investigations. Johnson is the founder and main author of No Quarter, a weblog that addresses issues of terrorism and intelligence and politics.)"

Blumenthal then quoted from a blog piece that Johnson wrote after hearing what happened during Secretary Clinton's speech at GWU on Feb. 15:

"During a speech by Hillary earlier this week at George Washington University retired CIA analyst, Ray McGovern, was physically accosted and arrested for disorderly conduct for the simple act of standing up and turning his back to Hillary. Ray ended his career at the CIA as one of the senior officers who provided George H.W. Bush his daily intelligence brief. Since then Ray has emerged as an anti-war activist. Ray is a fearless but he also is a kind, gentle soul. ...

"Unfortunately Hillary is getting blamed for what happened to Ray, but it is not her fault. Hillary is not in charge of her security detail. ... He had every right to stand and silently protest. He posed no threat to Hillary and made no

threatening move. The security folks grossly over-reacted. ... Since the folks inside the auditorium had gone thru a metal detector there was no reason to assume that Ray represented a threat to do harm. It is the ultimate irony that the Obama Administration is calling on foreign leaders to tolerate protest and dissent but when it comes to an old man standing silently there was no tolerance at all.”

[end of shortened text of email from Larry Johnson, quoted by Sidney Blumenthal]

Clever Wording

Secretary Clinton then replied:

To: Sidney Blumenthal Subject: “H: FYI, AN UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT. SID”

From: H hrod17@clintonemail.com [one of two email accounts that Clinton used]

To: sbwhoeop

Sent: Friday, February 18, 2011 10:14 AM [replying to Blumenthal less than an hour later]

Subject: Re: “H: FYI, an unfortunate incident.”

“Sid I appreciate your sending thgis (sic) to me. Neither State nor my staff had anything to do w this. The man stood up just as I was starting and GW—which claims their quick actions were part of their standard operating procedures to remove anyone who stands up and starts speaking while an invited guest is talking—moved to remove him. GW claims he was not in any way injured. We have no other info but I will see what else can be done.”

In this brief email, Secretary Clinton takes two misleading tacks. Though she had first-hand knowledge that I had not been “speaking” – since she was there – she suggests otherwise while not actually saying so. She just strongly implies that I was “speaking.”

Not only was she an eyewitness, numerous videos on the Internet in the days prior showed that I did not say a word until the security people had me in a headlock and almost out the door and into the street. Lawyers like Hillary Clinton apparently parse words – even on minor matters, and even in emails that they hope will never see the light of day. (And what, by the way, is the meaning of “is?”)

Similarly, Secretary Clinton attributes to GWU the claim that I “was not in any way injured.” Case closed. ... except for the photos sent around on the Web a few days earlier.

So, as you might guess, there was no apology from the Secretary of State or a statement that perhaps the “unfortunate incident” with McGovern had unfortunately stepped on her passionate and surely heartfelt denunciation of Iran for not respecting the right of dissidents to protest their government’s policies.

Targeting Gaddafi

But the incident with me was minor compared to what Secretary Clinton was then cooking up for Libya, where she was outraged that Col. Muammar Gaddafi was citing the need to root out Islamic terrorists operating around Benghazi. Dismissing Gaddafi’s claims, Clinton and her State Department preferred to denounce Gaddafi’s domestic “war on terror” as a “genocidal” attack on innocent dissenters in eastern Libya.

Again, Clinton was communicating with her outside adviser Blumenthal about how to rile the world up enough against Gaddafi to push a “no-fly zone” through the United Nations Security Council.

Secretary Clinton’s private emails also contradict her testimony before the House Benghazi Committee that Blumenthal “was not at all my adviser on Libya,” although I guess it depends on what your definition of “adviser” is. The emails show that she actually took immediate proactive steps to follow up on his advice, as can be seen in the following:

From: sbwhoeop [Sidney Blumenthal]

Sent: Monday, February 21, 2011 10:32 PM

To: H Subject: H: Option: no-fly zone over Libya. David Owen proposes. S

“UK former Foreign Secretary David Owen has called for a no-fly zone over Libya, imposed by the United Nations and/or Nato ... US might consider advancing tomorrow. Libyan helicopters and planes are raining terror on cities.”

[Article from Aljazeera as quoted by Blumenthal]: “In the wake of reported aiattacks (sic) on civilian crowds by the Libyan airforce, former Foreign Secretary Lord David Owen has called on the UN Security Council to immediately meet in emergency session and authorise a ‘No Fly Zone’ over Libya. Speaking on al Jazeera, Lord Owen called for a UN Charter Chapter 7 intervention (meaning the authorisation of both military and non-military means to ‘restore international peace and security’) to be enforced by NATO air forces with Egyptian military support to demonstrate regional backing.”

From: H <HDR22@clintonemail.com> [the other Clinton email, using her maiden name initials, Hillary Diane Rodham]

To: Sullivan, Jacob 3 [deputy chief of staff]

Sent: Mon Feb 21 22:42:21 2011

Subject: Fw: "H: Option: no-fly zone over Libya. David Owen proposes. Sid"

"What do you think of this idea?"

From: Sullivan, Jacob J [mailto:Sullivan33@state.gov]

Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2011 04:59 AM [early the next morning]

To: H

Subject: Re: "H: Option: no-fly zone over Libya. David Owen proposes. Sid"

"Several have proposed it but honestly, we actually don't know what is happening from the air right now. As we gain more facts, we can consider."

From: H hrod17@clintonemail.com [back to the other email address]

Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2011 6:09 AM

To: sbwhoeop

Subject: Re: "H: Option: no-fly zone over Libya. David Owen proposes."

"Sid, We are looking at that for Security Council, which remains reluctant to 'interfere' in the internal affairs of a country. Stay tuned!"

From: H <HDR22@clintonemall.com>

To: Sullivan, Jacob J

Sent: Tue Feb 22 06:34:15 2011

Subject: Re: "H: Option: no-fly zone over Libya. David Owen proposes. Sid"

"I've heard contradictory reports as to whether or not there are planes flying

and firing on crowds. What is the evidence that they are?"

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, February 22, 2011 7:21 AM

To: H

Subject: Re: "H: Option: no-fly zone over Libya. David Owen proposes. Sid"

"Not much – unconfirmed reports. Though helos firing seems more plausible."

On to War

It took three more weeks, but on March 17, 2011, Secretary Clinton got her wish for a "no-fly zone" approved by the UN Security Council, acting under the military authority of Chapter Seven of the UN Charter. The vote was ten in favor, zero against, and five abstentions.

The five abstentions were: Brazil, Russia, India, China and Germany; Russian and China, which as permanent members could have vetoed the motion, complained later that they were deceived as to the real purpose of the "no-fly zone," not realizing that it was a pretext for another "regime change," which involved slaughtering much of the Libyan army before driving Gaddafi from power.

When Gaddafi was captured in his home town of Sirte on Oct. 20, 2011, he was tortured with a knife, which was used to sodomize him. Then he was murdered. When Clinton was notified of Gaddafi's demise, she declared, "we came, we saw, he died" – and clapped her hands in undisguised glee.

It turned out, however, that Gaddafi was right that many of his adversaries in the east were radical jihadists and terrorists, a truth that Clinton learned when U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. personnel were slain by attackers in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012.

Clinton's deception around the Libyan "no-fly zone" – as a gateway to yet another brutal U.S.-backed "regime change" – also helped poison U.S. relations with Russia and China, which balked at similar U.S. demands for a "safe zone" inside Syria, an idea that Clinton has advocated both as Secretary of State and as a presidential candidate.

In other words, Clinton is no more honest about big things than small, just as the Bible passage foretold, except now the fate of the world may hang in the

balance.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as a CIA analyst for 27 years, and used to brief every other morning one of Secretary Clinton's predecessors, George P. Shultz, with the *President's Daily Brief*.

Price for Witnessing Against War

Exclusive: The funeral for anti-war priest Daniel Berrigan was a reminder of humanity's need to challenge immoral government actions and the price that one pays for doing so, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Fr. Daniel Berrigan's funeral was being live-streamed Friday, as I started to write this, which seems only fitting. Dan's witness and writing have been a constantly re-chargeable battery for my moral compass.

Live-streaming (arranged by *America* magazine) was the next-best thing to being at the funeral in person. And it brought back memories of getting shoe-horned into West Baltimore's St. Peter Claver church in early December 2002 for an equally moving celebration of the life of Dan's younger brother, Fr. Phil Berrigan.

Homilist Fr. Steve Kelly, S.J., who has spent more than a decade in this or that prison for non-violent resistance to war began with some Berrigan-style Irish humor: "Let members of the FBI assigned here today validate that it is Daniel Berrigan's funeral Mass of the Resurrection, so they can complete and perhaps close their files. 'Death has no dominion!' to quote Daniel's friend William Stringfellow."

Kelly then minced no words in calling out "appointed pastors who collude with structures of domination, blessing the bombs."

Tears welled as I watched Catholic Worker friends drop a large banner with the words from Isaiah, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares. Nations shall make war no more," a charge lived into by all three brothers Berrigan – Jerry, Dan, and Phil.

And I thought back on what I learned decades ago at retreats led by Dan on the prophets Isaiah and Amos.

During the eulogy, Liz McAlister, Phil's widow, quoted from the "apology" Dan wrote for burning draft cards with home-made napalm in Catonsville, Maryland, in May 1968 at the height of the Vietnam War:

"Our apologies, good friends, for the fracture of good order, the burning of paper instead of children, the angering of the orderlies in the front parlor of the charnel house."

Liz continued to read from the *Statement of the Catonsville 9*: "**The suppression of truth stops here; this war stops here!**" (emphasis added by Liz's own prophetic voice.) Not stopping was the loud, un-church-like cheering that rattled the rafters.

So Liz added a vintage Berrigan admonition for those who "seek ways to exempt themselves from responsibility." I had the feeling that the affirming crowd would still be making a din, had not Phil's daughter Frida gently gestured: Please, let my mom finish.

Thanks to the live-streaming, I could discern many of my friends at the still functioning Dorothy Day Catholic Worker houses for men and women in the Bowery. The only folks missing were those doing the daily Martha-work of preparing food for the lunch line. Ringing in my ears was another charge, heard hundreds of times from my Irish grandmother: "Show me your company, and I'll tell you who you are!"

As the daughter of the late Jerry Berrigan, eldest of the three brothers, added her words to the eulogy, I felt proud to be out on bail, awaiting trial with 11 others of the "Jerry Berrigan Memorial Anti-Drone Brigade" for shutting down the main entrance and exit to Hancock Air Force Base Brigade near Syracuse, New York, on the morning of Jan. 28, 2016. Jerry, who lived in Syracuse, was frequently arrested there for similar protests against drone killings.

'Whatever His Views, He's Harmless'

Following people like Dan, Phil, and Jerry can get you beaten up and thrown in jail, but the benefits are out of this world, so to speak. Watching Dan's funeral, I found myself musing over the words chosen by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's confidant Sidney Blumenthal, reassuring Clinton that she had nothing to fear from the likes of me.

On Feb. 15, 2011, at George Washington University, Clinton had, with callous aplomb, completely ignored my getting assaulted by two security personnel as I silently stood directly in front of her with my back turned.

In a Feb. 18, 2011 [email](#), Blumenthal explained: "Ray McGovern, a former CIA

officer who gave the daily brief for President George H.W. Bush, is pretty well known in the intelligence community. He's become a Christian antiwar leftist who goes around bearing witness. Whatever his views, he's harmless."

Harmless or not, I can see my grandmother smiling down at the company I now keep, and whispering in her thick Irish brogue, "If you were really harmless, Raymond, they would not be writing them email things about you."

It was not so long ago that I moved in circles where the label "activist" was dismissed as misguided but, well, harmless. How fortunate, then, to learn of the definition given to activism by my co-passenger on the U.S. Boat to Gaza, poet Alice Walker: "Activism is the rent I pay for living on this planet."

I could not be more grateful at having fallen in, better late than never, with such companions. Dan's funeral served as a reminder of how much my journey has changed – having witnessed power from the inside, and the consequences of challenging it from the outside.

On the Inside

During the first Ronald Reagan administration, it was my job to conduct early morning one-on-one briefings of the Secretary of Defense (Caspar Weinberger), Secretary of State (George Shultz), and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Gen. Jack Vessey) and also, depending on their schedules, Vice President George H. W. Bush, as well as a movable feast of Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs.

Another senior CIA officer and I took turns, each of us briefing every other day six days a week. As professional intelligence analysts, we conducted ourselves in a completely non-partisan way, and our services were appreciated. We relied largely on *The President's Daily Brief* that we had helped prepare the day before, and we updated and supplemented the material in it, as needed.

Ronald Reagan was given these one-on-one briefings as soon as he became president-elect and put considerable value on them. Once in the White House, however, he ordered that, as a general rule, the early morning briefings be given to his most senior national security advisers whom he would normally ask to brief him directly several hours later.

When I took early retirement at age 50, I was fully aware that few others on "the outside" had the privilege of acquiring a first-hand feel for how intelligence could be used, and power abused.

At the time, however, I had no inkling that the creeping politicization and careerism fostered by senior CIA official Robert Gates on behalf of Reagan's CIA

Director William Casey would corrupt managers and analysts alike to the point they would let themselves be suborned into conjuring up the kind of faux intelligence that President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney ordered up to “justify” war on Iraq.

‘Quid Est Veritas?’

What brought this to mind earlier this week was the tenth anniversary of an impromptu, four-minute debate that I had with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Atlanta on May 4, 2006.

It was not hard to prove him an inveterate liar about important matters like the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) he said were in Iraq – but weren’t; and the ties that existed between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein – but didn’t. But my Rumsfeld anniversary brought a painful reminder that things have hardly improved – and that no one has challenged former Secretary Clinton openly about her lies – about Syria and Libya, for example. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “A Need to Clear Up Clinton Questions.”]

The opportunities for such challenge have become fewer; the penalties harsher; the Fawning Corporate Media dumber and dumber.

The mini-debate with Rumsfeld in Atlanta depended largely on luck. Not only had I truth as my breastplate, so to speak, but the stars were nicely aligned. People like Rumsfeld, an accomplished Princeton debater (and, for that matter, Wellesley valedictorian Hillary Clinton), are required to keep careful track of their lies. Those not normally burdened with that extra chore – professional intelligence analysts, for example – enjoy a distinct advantage, even in times like these, when all too many Caesars keep asking “Quid est Veritas?” – “what is truth?” – a phrase attributed to Pontius Pilate during the trial of Jesus.

As it turned out, I had some success – momentarily, at least – exposing Rumsfeld, who had played fast and loose with the truth, while enjoying the “matinee-idol” label pinned on him by President George W. Bush during the initial weeks of “shock and awe.”

The abundance of evidence notwithstanding, my attempts to expose the lies of Hillary Clinton proved much more difficult (as I was wrestled away by security guards for turning my back on the Secretary of State), and I had zero success exposing Teflon-coated General (and former CIA Director) David Petraeus for the fraud he is (as I was arrested by New York City police at the entrance of a Petraeus speech). Worse still, the violence I encountered escalated with each nonviolent attempt.

With Rumsfeld, none of the media stenographers at Pentagon briefings ever looked up from their pads long enough to ask the Defense Secretary a direct question about his prevarications, so the Pentagon prima donna seemed a bit shocked by a factual question he could not spin.

So, Rumsfeld was not used to fielding “impertinent,” un-self-censored questions. Indeed, it may have seemed to some as though I were unfairly blindsiding the poor Secretary of Defense.

An Exchange with Power

The setting for Rumsfeld’s talk was a little-known, defense-secretary-friendly-Southern-white-male-upper-crust “think tank.” There was no advance notice of Rumsfeld’s talk on its website, but some women friends from the World Can’t Wait figured out a way to get me a ticket (for \$70!).

The impromptu debate went as follows:

RAY McGOVERN: And so, I would like to ask you to be up front with the American people. Why did you lie to get us into a war that was not necessary and that has caused these kinds of casualties? Why?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Well, first of all, I haven’t lied. I did not lie then. Colin Powell didn’t lie. He spent weeks and weeks with the Central Intelligence Agency people and prepared a presentation that I know he believed was accurate, and he presented that to the United Nations. The President spent weeks and weeks with the Central Intelligence people, and he went to the American people and made a presentation. I’m not in the intelligence business. They gave the world their honest opinion. It appears that there were not weapons of mass destruction there.

RAY McGOVERN: You said you knew where they were?

DONALD RUMSFELD: I did not. I said I knew where suspect sites were, and we were
—

RAY McGOVERN: You said you knew where they were, “near Tikrit, near Baghdad, and northeast, south and west of there.” Those were your words.

DONALD RUMSFELD: My words — my words were — no, no, no, wait a minute! Let him stay one second. Just a second.

RAY McGOVERN: This is America, huh? Go ahead.

DONALD RUMSFELD: You’re getting plenty of play, sir.

RAY McGOVERN: I'd just like an honest answer.

DONALD RUMSFELD: I'm giving it to you.

RAY McGOVERN: We're talking about lies and your allegation that there was bulletproof evidence of ties between al-Qaeda and Iraq. Was that a lie or were you misled?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Zarqawi was in Baghdad during the prewar period. That is a fact.

RAY McGOVERN: Zarqawi, he was in the north of Iraq, in a place where Saddam Hussein had no rule. That's where he was.

DONALD RUMSFELD: He was also in Baghdad.

RAY McGOVERN: Yeah, when he needed to go to the hospital. Come on, these people aren't idiots. They know the story.

DONALD RUMSFELD: You are – let me give you an example. It's easy for you to make a charge, but why do you think that the men and women in uniform every day, when they came out of Kuwait and went into Iraq, put on chemical weapon protective suits? Because they liked the style? They honestly believed that there were chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein had used chemical weapons on his own people previously. He had used them on his neighbor, the Iranians. And they believed he had those weapons. We believed he had those weapons.

RAY McGOVERN: That's what we call a non-sequitur. It doesn't matter what the troops believe. It matters what you believe.

MODERATOR: I think, Mr. Secretary, the debate is over. We have other questions, courtesy to the audience.

'Let Him Stay'

Early in the exchange, the black-hatted point man from Rumsfeld's SWAT Team (clearly seen in the video) put his elbow in my solar plexus as I was speaking and started to pry me from the microphone to which I was adhering like permanent glue.

However, after a glance in the direction of the TV cameras, Rumsfeld waved him off, with a "no, no, no, wait a minute! Let him stay one second. Just a second." It was a snap decision to continue the debate, with Rumsfeld convinced he could put me in my place. After all, I had identified myself as a former CIA analyst, and Rumsfeld had had an easy time intimidating CIA directors George Tenet and Porter Goss, as well as those of my former colleagues badgered into dancing the

Cheney/Rumsfeld fraudulent tango on Iraq.

The event also took place early enough that afternoon to make the evening news. Better still, the event was aired live on C-Span and CNN. All this together made it very difficult for TV producers, anchors and pundits to brush off my challenges to Rumsfeld as inconsequential. Besides, there was very little happening that was newsworthy on May 4, 2006, which put icing on the cake.

In any case, the tense scene of a citizen challenging the great and powerful Rumsfeld with real questions was so unusual that even the corporate media recognized it as “news” and gave it at least fleeting attention on the evening news shows.

But my unmasking of Rumsfeld’s Iraq War lies also created a highly unwelcome precedent that I would be made to pay for by soon being pigeonholed as a disgruntled stalker.

CNN anchor Paula Zahn’s first questions that evening were (1) “How long have you harbored this animus against Donald Rumsfeld?” and (2) why was I “following the Secretary of Defense all the way down to Atlanta?”

I explained that, in fact, I had gotten to Atlanta first – to receive, that same evening, the ACLU’s National Civil Liberties Award (won the previous year by Coretta Scott King).

I could not remember how long I had had “this animus” toward Rumsfeld. Were I quicker on my feet, I would have said something like – since his lies got thousands of human beings killed in an unnecessary war. But you don’t get a do-over.

After the Zahn interview, CNN’s Anderson Cooper’s first question, asked of me haltingly as I was exiting the auditorium, was much less hostile but, in its own way, far more revealing: “Weren’t you afraid?” he asked. Think about that for a while.

No Such Luck With Hillary

Five years later, with some slight hope for an encore during a possible Q & A – this time with then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton – I wangled a ticket to hear her speak at George Washington University on Feb. 15, 2011. After several minutes of fulsome praise from the university president and prolonged, standing, adulatory applause from the carefully chosen audience, before Clinton even uttered a word, I decided to remain standing in silence with my back to her.

Unlike Rumsfeld in 2006, Secretary of State Clinton was taking no chances. True,

her speech focused on the need to respect dissent, but she was talking about the authorities in Iran, not in Washington. She missed not a syllable as she watched me brutalized directly in front of her and then dragged down the main aisle (with Clinton seeing-no-evil and nary a peep from the Hillary-friendly audience of by-standers/by-sitters).

Once outside the auditorium, a Clinton security-woman interrogated me at some length, after two sets of steel handcuffs were put on my wrists. I was then arrested and dumped into jail.

Perhaps Clinton thought her tacit condoning of this pre-emptive strike by her security folks would provide a useful deterrent to others who might choose nonviolent but highly visible ways to express dissent – or, God forbid, ask an impertinent question of the kind asked of Rumsfeld in Atlanta.

Unlike my encounter with Rumsfeld and even though multiple TV cameras caught the brutal way I was seized and thrown out directly in front of Hillary Clinton (“escorted out” is the gentle way Fox News put it), there was almost no further mention in mainstream media.

The Clinton incident happened at the same time of day as my mini-debate with Rumsfeld, so its absence from the evening news had nothing to do with the news cycle. Still, one would have thought the Kafkaesque nature of my brutalization at the very moment Clinton waxed eloquent about respecting dissent – in Iran – might have provided irresistible grist for a news story or commentary.

But in the five years that had passed since the Rumsfeld event in Atlanta, the media had grown five years-worth tamer. And, in contrast to Rumsfeld’s quick calculation as he looked at the cameras in the back, Clinton apparently believed she could count on the TV outlets and pundits NOT to give much coverage to the assault. In any case, she calculated correctly.

A number of Washington media stenographers were there, of course, as well as the cameras, but the evening TV producers and anchors chose the safer path. After all, no “sensible” commentator or outlet will gratuitously put out of joint the nose of a probable heiress to the presidency.

Less Tolerance of Dissent

If my understandable chagrin at the way Hillary Clinton ignored the assault right in front of her leaves me open to charges of having an “animus” toward Hillary Clinton, so be it. That is very small potatoes in the grand scheme of things.

My “animus” was substantive – her share of responsibility for all manner of

death and destruction because of her vote for the Iraq War and the benighted escalation/surge in Afghanistan, for example. It would be only another couple of months after her GWU speech before she helped create equal tragedies in Libya and Syria.

I suppose I should thank my blessings in having avoided the far more brutal, fatal treatment accorded Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Although I had a ticket to hear David Petraeus speak at the 92nd Y in New York City on Oct. 30, 2014, I was barred from even entering, roughly treated, whisked away by NYPD cops already on the scene and jailed overnight in the infamous “The Tombs” beneath the Criminal Court in lower Manhattan.

Although my arrest occurred in the so-called “media capital of the world,” the incident was almost completely ignored at least in the mainstream media. [See Consortiumnews.com’s, “When Silencing Dissent Isn’t News.”]

The trend seems to be more violence from the “organs of state security,” as they were known in Soviet parlance, and more silence in the mainstream media.

All the more need to follow the example of the Berrigans.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and CIA analyst for a total of 30 years and, after retiring, co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

The Pentagon’s Medal Inflation

Like grade inflation in college, the Pentagon has engaged in medal inflation, diluting awards for actual heroism by proliferating ribbons for bureaucratic skills, as Chuck Spinney and James Perry Stevenson explain.

By Chuck Spinney

It should be clear that the Global War on Terror (GWOT) launched by George W. Bush and perpetuated by Barack Obama is a bust. It is now the longest war in U.S. history; it is now the second most expensive war in U.S. history; and there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

Yet despite the GWOT’s astronomical cost, forces deployed and combat tempos are minuscule when compared with those of the far lower cost Vietnam

War. Nevertheless, the top uniformed and civilian officials in the Pentagon are whining to Congress that these tepid tempos have created a looming readiness crisis. They assert the relatively small cutbacks in the future growth implied by the budget caps of Budget Control Act of 2011 to what is by far the largest defense budget in the world is now the “gravest strategic danger” facing the United States!

A logical person, living in a sane world, would think that the GWOT, its high cost, its clearly broken nature, and the huge size of the defense budget would be major issues in the 2016 presidential election. But the presidential candidates and the mainstream media, like the Pentagon, are silent on this surreal travesty. Indeed, the pathologies of the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex (MICC) are as much off limits in contemporary political discourse as is foul language is at holy communion.

In part, that is due to the fact that lots of people and a substantial part of our nation’s economy are prospering – i.e., they are becoming rich and powerful – from living off the MICC’s degenerating status quo. One metric of this obscene transfer of wealth can be seen in the proliferation of MICC-related “McMansions” in and around Versailles on the Potomac.

Sustaining the money flow through the MICC requires ornaments of success to compensate for and distract attention from its glittering if depressing reality. The proliferation of American flags in politicians’ lapels and on car bumpers, suggesting uncritical patriotism and triumphalism, is one example. Fantasies dressed up in Power-Point briefings about ever emerging technical revolutions, implying the future will be different from the past, are yet other examples of how ornaments prop up a dysfunctional reality in contemporary discourse.

My long-time friend and partner in crime, James P. Stevenson, has just written an essay analyzing yet another, little examined set of visual aids propping up the surrealism of the MICC. His subject is the proliferation of glittering “been there, done that” decorations now adorning the chests of our senior military officers.

Jim proves his point (1) by making an elegantly simple comparison of the gongs adorning the chests of today’s generals to those that adorned the chests of the World War II generals – a war which historians may remember as our last “successful” war (thanks in large part to the enormous contributions of the Soviet Union) and (2) by showing how today’s gong show highlights individual careerism and vanity while degrading the recognition of heroism and self-sacrifice.

To be sure, as Jim is at pains to point out, gong proliferation did not begin with the GWOT, but it has grown over time. But I would add, like the MICC (and the MICC's McMansions), which also evolved slowly and insensibly over time, gong proliferation, especially in the highest ranks, metastasized during the GWOT.

Attached herewith is Stevenson's handiwork – think of it as yet another metaphor for the Defense Death Spiral and yet another canary in the coal mine warning us of decay within.

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the "Spinney Report," which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems. [This story originally appeared at Spinney's blog at <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2016/04/pentagon-gong-show.html>]

It's Hard to Tell War Heroes From Paper-Pushers When Everybody Gets So Many Dumb Ribbons

By James Perry Stevenson, War is Boring, April 25, 2016

There has been a jarring addition to U.S. military uniforms since the end of World War II. Seventy years ago, high-ranking officers wore relatively few ribbons or medals—and awards for valor were rare. Go back farther to the Civil War, and it was common for officers to not wear military decorations at all.

But for the modern officer, it's now possible to perform one's duties without being a hero and still have a chest full of ribbons that are indecipherable to all but the most dedicated students of phaleristics.

Most of all, the typical Twenty-first Century American general is a walking wall of multi-colored "great job" ribbons, none of which are awards for valor.

The ribbons have spread so widely that it has become difficult to differentiate heroes from bedecked bureaucrats, assignment-junkies and dedicated self-improvement types—which, I suppose, is partly the point.

The bureaucrats who added the great-job ribbons have ensured that some of these ribbons rank higher than do most medals for actual, individual acts of heroism. That obviously reflects misplaced priorities within the U.S. military's value-system. But that isn't to say we should take away the officers' ribbons.

No, there's a better way—one that would visually differentiate awards for valor and heroism from the clutter of ribbons for "great job," "been there" and "done that."

The American military acknowledges the commendable and selfless efforts of its soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen in two distinct

ways?—?promotions and medals.

The difference between a ribbon and a medal is merely technical. A ribbon is worn on the everyday uniform, while medals are reserved for formal occasions. They both refer to the same award.

Traditionally, the military rewards jobs-well-done with better or faster promotions. For officers, the addition of gold braid on their sleeves or a change in silver insignia represents an easy-to-discern promotion in rank.

In cases where no promotion takes place, a new, more responsible assignment?—?such as becoming a commanding officer of a ship or aircraft squadron?—?is a clear indication of an officer's continuous good work.

Acts of valor, on the other hand, are usually brief events?—?sometimes instantaneous?—?but of course are still worthy of note. Awarding ribbons are the usual way the military offers this notice.

The military also assigns precedence among various ribbons by placing them in an order of importance, with the most important residing at the top of a uniform's area for ribbons, and the least important living at the bottom.

A full chest of ribbons usually contains the four types?—?one each for valor, for a job well-done, for stating where and when the wearer served, and?—?finally?—?ribbons representing an individual's professional self-improvement.

It gets more complicated. The military also awards "dual-use" ribbons that can indicate heroism with a quarter-inch "V" attachment. The Army and Air Force call the "V" the "V Device" and the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard call it the "Combat V."

Without the V, the ribbon stands for "extraordinary" or "meritorious" conduct. And this varies between service branches. The same medal can mean different things depending on the service that issues it. Yes, this is complicated. Thanks for bearing with me.

At the beginning of World War II, the big three awards for valor and heroism?—?the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star?—?were known to most military personnel and even to many civilians.

But with the growth of military bureaucracy, manned by more and more careerists whose fingers have pulled more paper than triggers, the military developed a mindset that these silent warriors, working behind the lines, needed some recognition. The rear-echelon types began issuing themselves ribbons simply for

being good administrators.

As a result, it's gotten really hard to discern a hero from a bureaucrat. Plus there's the visual pollution of dozens of ribbons adorning one uniform. Furthermore, ribbon-proliferation dilutes the importance of any particular award. Any one medal doesn't mean a whole lot when everyone's got lots and lots of them.

The following series, depicting four sets of ribbons, shows the evolution of medals for heroism competing with great-job ribbons.

The top seven ribbons the U.S. Army awarded at the beginning of World War II—five ribbons for heroism, one for a great job, and one for being wounded—are depicted here in priority order. The Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal (a great-job medal), the Silver Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Soldier's Medal for non-combat heroism and the Purple Heart.

The only addition for heroism in the U.S. Army by the end of 1945 was the Bronze Star Medal with the V Device. The medals the Army added for heroism after the 1950s are the Air Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal and the Army Commendation Medal, all of which offer the opportunity to attach the V Device, converting the ribbon from great-job award to an award for heroism.

Heroism medals have to compete visually with great-job medals as well as ones for "been there" and "done that." If we were to limit visual clutter to only the addition of great-job ribbons, you begin to see the problem.

Hero medals now compete with great-job ribbons added since the end of World War II (in red) and great-job ribbons added before and during World War II (in green). In both cases, hero ribbons compete for precedence. In some cases, great-job ribbons outrank awards for heroism. Furthermore, the qualifications are such that only those at the top of the military hierarchy are in a position to receive them.

Take the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, which outranks the Silver Star, the third-highest medal for heroism. According to the Defense Department, the DDSM is only awarded to "members whose direct and individual contribution to national security or national defense are recognized as being so exceptional in scope and value as to be equivalent to contribution associated with positions encompassing broader responsibilities."

But isn't that what high-ranking generals and admirals are supposed to do? Awarding generals and admirals a medal for "encompassing broader responsibilities" after also giving them four stars is the functional equivalent

of a participation award.

Not that many service members would even recognize the great-job ribbons. The author's recent unscientific survey of a group of U.S. Air Force enlisted airmen illustrates the effect of ribbon-clutter. None of the five airmen could name or recognize any valor-based ribbon aside from the Medal of Honor.

"We have trouble keeping up with the ribbons they keep awarding us, so when we see someone else's medals, we usually try to see what ribbons we might have in common," one airman said.

That airman has been in the Air Force for just under four years and yet he had been awarded seven ribbons. For a comparison, Army generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and Henry "Hap" Arnold each received only 10 American ribbons during their entire military careers—culminating, of course, with World War II.

The ribbons received by an Air Force airman after four years is close to reaching the number of American ribbons two American generals, Eisenhower and Arnold, received after over 30 or 40 years respectively in the U.S. Army.

Now contrast the number of ribbons Army general Omar Bradley received by the end of World War II to the ribbons awarded to Gen. David Petraeus after his 37-year career in the U.S. Army that ended in 2011.

Gen. David Petraeus's Medals.

Seven of Petraeus's 11 personal decorations were created after 1970, so if he wore only those medals available during World War II, he would have just four medals and only one for heroism—the Bronze Star Medal with V Device.

Gen. Omar Bradley's Medals.

Bradley's medals were all awarded by the end of World War II, including the Silver Star, the third-highest medal for heroism.

The addition of been-there and done-that ribbons added to Petraeus's personal decorations, resulting in a display not unlike that of a Latin American potentate. Petraeus's look differs from Bradley's more conservative appearance.

This is not to diminish the importance of great-job medals. Indeed, they are an important function of personal military decorations. Rewarding great work is an appropriate application of military medals, particularly for younger service members.

It's possible that great work can have an even greater benefit to the military and the country than an individual's heroic acts. An excellent example is

illustrated by the efforts of the late Air Force Colonel John R. Boyd.

Five years after Boyd received his first Legion of Merit as a 32-year old Air Force captain—a virtually unheard-of feat, as the Legion of Merit is often referred to as a “colonel’s medal”—he received another Legion of Merit because he “developed the energy-maneuverability concept,” which helps pilots and designers to compare one airplane against another in a quantitative way.

In layman’s terms, his methods permitted pilots to see where an enemy airplane has advantages and disadvantages in the air. Boyd took his energy-maneuverability concepts to Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War and briefed pilots on how to use the concepts to avoid getting hit by surface-to-air missiles.

While waiting for a friend at the Miramar Naval Air Station Officer’s Club, I struck up a conversation with an officer sitting next to me at the bar. Noticing his gold wings and ribbons, indicating he’d been to Vietnam, I asked him if he’d ever heard of John Boyd.

“You bet,” he said.

“What do you know about him?” I asked.

“He came over to ‘Nam to brief us on how to use his energy-maneuverability to evade SAMs.”

“What did you think of his briefing?”

“My wingman thought he was full of crap. I didn’t. Only one of us is here talking to you.”

Boyd ultimately was awarded four Legions of Merit. The cumulative effect of his efforts most likely saved more lives than any singular heroic act. However, if Boyd were alive today, I believe he would agree that individual acts of heroism should be at the head of the line.

Here then is a better way to make valorous awards stand out—and in such a way that even civilians will know they’re looking at a warrior who has risked his or her life to save others.

Currently, the regulations call for unit citations—ribbons awarded to a group rather than to an individual—to be displayed on the right side of the uniform from the wearer’s perspective, the side opposite of where ribbons are normally worn. Although unit citations are important, deference should be given to the individual hero.

Looking at the picture of Petraeus, it's not immediately obvious that he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with a V Device, a medal for heroism. But if it were on the right side where unit citations currently reside all alone, it would be clear to anyone that he'd been awarded a ribbon for heroism.

Ranking great-job medals higher in precedence than those for heroism also indicates a misunderstanding of human nature—and a miscalculation of value—on the part of the military bureaucracy

It is often less-expensive enlisted personnel who find themselves in hazardous conditions and who are likely to encounter—to put it obliquely—the opportunity to demonstrate valor. Awarding a two-star general at the Pentagon the third-highest military ribbon for creativity with his pen and ranking such action greater than, say, a combat soldier saving someone during a firefight, is plain wrong.

Becoming a one-star general or admiral should be reward in and of itself. And rising from one star to four should require no further adulation.

As Napoleon famously observed, humans are motivated by the possibility of being acknowledged for having done more than was expected of them. Our own Medal of Honor, awarded for acts “above and beyond the call of duty,” acknowledges this. Congress was concerned enough about the dilution of the Medal of Honor that, over the decades, lawmakers have passed several laws making it a crime to falsely wear the United States' highest award ... or even claim to have won it.

A U.S. court of appeals effectively endorsed those laws in early 2016. “We conclude that the government ... has a ‘substantial countervailing objective’ of avoiding dilution of ‘the country’s recognition of [the award recipient’s] sacrifice in the form of military honors,’” the court wrote.

But an unintentional dilution of medals for valor, honor and sacrifice is exactly what has happened due to the proliferation of ribbons. To honor our true heroes, we should isolate their ribbons for the sake of visual clarity. Put 'em on the wearer's right.

That won't totally solve the ribbon-clutter problem. But it's a start.

Hillary ‘the Hawk’ Clinton

As the Democratic Party grimly marches toward Hillary Clinton's nomination, little thought has been given to her extraordinary record as a war hawk and what that could mean to the world, observes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Mark Landler has an interesting extended [article](#) in the *New York Times* about how Hillary Clinton came to views about the use of military force that have made her, in Landler's words, "the last true hawk left" in this year's presidential race.

Landler poses the question of Clinton's motivations as a traditional dichotomy between "calculated political maneuver" and "deeply felt core principle," and suggests that in the case of Clinton's hawkishness it is more the latter than the former. But much of what the article describes is less a matter of principle than of sociology.

Maybe what we are witnessing is to some extent long-term compensation for what otherwise might have been seen as a weak spot for Clinton. Landler relates a story that Clinton herself has told, about being rebuffed when she went to a Marine recruiting office in the mid-1970s and expressed interest in joining the Corps, at least in a reserve capacity, as an attorney.

Reporters have cast doubt on the story, but it would not be surprising for a woman, a Democrat, and the wife of a clever draft-evader to see advantage in establishing a connection with the military and establishing herself as a military wonk.

That much may indeed be a calculated political maneuver, but once the maneuvering began, much of the further development of the fledgling into a full-fledged hawk was through a sort of osmosis from the outlook of some of those around her.

Her experience as First Lady living in the White House, which as Landler notes is "in many ways, like living in a military compound," deepened her positive feelings toward the military. Then when she really began schmoozing with generals, it was as one of the boys.

The former commander of the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York relates how when then-Senator Clinton first visited the post, "She sat down, took her shoes off, put her feet up on the coffee table and said, 'General, do you know where a gal can get a cold beer around here?'"

She later developed a close relationship with retired Army general and resident Fox News hawk Jack Keane, to whom Clinton quickly took a liking because, according to one former associate, “She loves that Irish gruff thing.”

By contrast, she had chilly relationships, and differences over Afghanistan, with some cerebral officers who had risen high in the Army: Karl Eikenberry, the former U.S. military commander and then ambassador there, and Douglas Lute, a White House coordinator on Afghanistan. One of her former aides explained, “She likes the nail-eaters”—people like Keane, Stanley McChrystal, and David Petraeus—“Real military guys, not these retired three-stars who go into civilian jobs.”

The relationship with Keane was an entree into relationships with other active and retired senior officers such as Petraeus, and the advantages accrued to both sides of the relationship.

“It worked to their mutual benefit,” Landler writes. “Petraeus was building ties to a prominent Democratic voice in the Senate; Clinton was burnishing her image as a friend of the troops.”

There was more mutual benefit in the debates within the Obama administration over policy on Afghanistan. Tom Nides, a former senior official in Clinton’s State Department, says that Pentagon leaders looking for a bigger surge of troops in Afghanistan “knew that if they walked into the Situation Room and they had her, it made a huge difference in the dynamics.”

In the course of providing that sort of political cover and playing the role of uber-hawk on Afghanistan, Clinton – as later observed by Afghanistan hand Sarah Chayes – “contributed to the overmilitarizing of the analysis of the problem” while never following through on a talked-about civilian surge.

What is disturbing about this whole portrait is how much positions apparently are being determined, if not by narrow political calculations, by dynamics and relationships that really are more the province of sociology than of national security policy analysis. It is disturbing not just as a statement about Hillary Clinton – who, like Barack Obama, is smart enough to be able to do careful policy analysis on national security matters – but as a broader statement of how much of that manner of arriving at positions on the use of military force infuses overall debate on foreign policy.

Hillary Clinton is a mainstream candidate who mostly plays according to what Mr. Obama would call the Washington “playbook.” A pattern such as overmilitarization of analysis of a subject such as Afghanistan is a recurrent problem and not unique to any one figure such as Clinton.

If Hillary Clinton is elected president – a probable outcome – an important question is whether once in office, given the changes in relationships and thus in the sociology, not to mention her sitting at the desk where the buck stops, her postures on use of military force also will change.

Will those postures be an output of feet-on-the-coffee-table affinity with favored military officers, or more the product of detached and careful analysis as exhibited by her predecessor?

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon."]

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

Is Hillary Clinton Above the Law?

Exclusive: Secretary of State Clinton was harsh on subordinates who were careless with classified information, but those rules apparently weren't for her, a troubling double standard, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

"Enough of the emails," said Sen. Bernie Sanders in Brooklyn-ese, while turning to Secretary Hillary Clinton during their first debate on Oct. 13, 2015. Sanders won loud applause for what seemed a gentlemanly gesture in withholding criticism for her use of a private email server for classified information.

But when Sanders said "The American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn emails," I had a flashback to a House hearing three decades ago on large liberties taken with the law during the Iran-Contra affair under President Ronald Reagan. Beginning his testimony, then-Secretary of State George Shultz made the mistake of saying, in effect, who cares about laws being violated: "The American people are tired of hearing about Iran-Contra."

Rep. David Obey, D-Wisconsin, was quick to respond: "Mr. Secretary, I did not take an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States until I got tired."

Well, we intelligence professionals also took an oath to support and defend the

Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic. There was no “until we got tired” – or even “until we retired” in that oath. It has no expiration date. Congressman Obey’s persistence and tenacity offer a model for patriots.

It has been six months since Sanders’s magnanimous gesture let Clinton off the hook for playing fast and loose with laws passed to protect classified information. During subsequent debates, everything but the kitchen sink has been hurled at the candidates, but there has been little appetite for asking Secretary Clinton what she thought she was doing, and why she decided to ignore security safeguards. (The reason often given – because she liked her Blackberry so much – does not withstand close scrutiny.)

While “mainstream” media have largely avoided the issue, it did get mentioned during the March 9 debate in Miami. Longtime news anchor for *Noticiero Univision*, Jorge Ramos, asked Secretary Clinton whether she would quit the presidential race if she were indicted for putting classified information on her private email server. She replied: “Oh, for goodness sake, it’s not going to happen. I’m not even answering that question.”

But this is too important an issue to sweep under the rug. It is not only we veteran intelligence professionals who are alarmed at what appears, at best, to be Clinton’s carelessness and, at worst, her deliberate attempt to conduct her affairs in complete secrecy, avoiding the strictures of, for example, the Freedom of Information Act, which can give the people and historians access to public records in the future so they can understand how government decisions were made. So researchers who care about democracy care.

It is also the FBI that cares, and the National Security Agency, which is responsible for ensuring secure communications, cares. And so do all who may have sent a sensitive piece of intelligence to her that she, in turn, might have put on her unclassified system. If Americans at large were briefed on the potential national security implications, they too would care.

One of the distinct advantages of the collegial way we operate in Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) is that when, as now, one of us needs input from tried and trusted specialists, it is immediately at hand. So, I consulted several of my colleagues with special knowledge of these matters.

A Severe Compromise

For technical commentary on this issue, I turned to a specialist VIPS colleague named William Binney, who worked for NSA for 36 years. Binney co-founded NSA’s SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) Automation Research Center, and

retired from NSA as Technical Director. He said he shares my very strong feelings on the issue. He told me the following:

“The email issue with Secretary Clinton is one of the most severe compromises of security I have ever known. After all, if the Chinese, Russians and other hackers can penetrate the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) servers and take the records of over 21 million U.S. citizens that over the years have applied for security clearances, then penetrating Hillary Clinton’s private server would be a piece of cake. Such penetration would yield insight into decision making at the highest level of the U.S. government, including what might be revealed in emails with the President.

“This is worse than the compromise of predominantly lower-level data by Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning and gives insight into planning at the highest levels in Washington – something that even all the torrent of data exposed by Edward Snowden could not provide. Reports that Clinton instructed subordinates to delete the security classification line on sensitive reports and email them to her, suggests a total disregard for the need to protect classified information and arrogance in deeming herself above lawful regulations governing the handling such data.

“We might as well have had an in-place mole at the highest level of our government. The FBI/Department of Justice would have already indicted lesser officials for less. Certainly, Clinton is receiving special treatment. It is a safe guess that FBI investigators are seething over their inability, so far, to pursue the case against Hillary with the vigor it merits.

“The case of Gen. David Petraeus comes immediately to mind. There was mucho seething at the FBI, when Petraeus gave his mistress classified documents of extreme sensitivity, lied about it to FBI investigators, and was let off with a slap on the wrist.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Gen. Petraeus: Too Big to Jail.”](#)]

Operational Perspective

With the aim of getting expert commentary from an operational perspective, I turned to Scott Ritter, who served on Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf’s staff during the first Gulf war, before he became chief U.N. weapons inspector for Iraq. Here’s what Ritter had to say:

“I can say that NSA/JSOC (and even U.N. teams such as the one I was running in Iraq) would LOVE for a foreign official at the secretary-of-state level to use a private server for official communications. One need simply to mimic a cell tower (the Stingray technology in vogue today would suffice) and you instantly have access to everything such an official does/says/types on a cell phone. That

senior official would no longer have the unique identifiers and encryption that an official server would provide.

“By the way, it is no longer a secret that we targeted the unencrypted communications that Saddam Hussein and his closest advisers sent out, not just the encrypted ones. Any communications traffic analyst will tell you that simply reading the unclassified traffic provides a plethora of actionable intelligence – particularly since the communications intercepted are in real time.”

In the Field

So what can happen in the field – in combat areas and in places like Kabul – when regulations governing the handling of classified information are disregarded? For perspective on this, I turned to Matthew Hoh, Marine Captain in Iraq and later a senior State Department official in Afghanistan. He answered:

“Ordinary Americans need to know how serious this is. Just last week we witnessed one example of what could have happened when Secretary of State John Kerry was visiting Kabul and the Taliban tried to attack him with rockets. Whenever the President, Vice President, Secretary of State or Defense, Joint Chiefs Chairman, or a congressional delegation visits Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iraq, the planning and arrangements are secret. But this is the type of information that could be sent over Clinton’s personal email, hacked, and gotten a senior American official killed.

“Another example would be Clinton discussing information relating to intercepts of foreign leaders. It’s possible in her correspondence she could mention something regarding Putin, Cameron, Modi, et al. that we capture via SIGINT. That would not only be an embarrassment; it would blow that capability for such access (and squander the millions of dollars spent in creating it). Fortunately for the other world leaders, they don’t seem to have been as arrogant or dumb (or both of the above) in insisting on using non-secure communications.

“Was it not amazing that Clinton protégé, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, plotted the Feb. 22 coup in Ukraine with the U.S. Ambassador in Kiev on an insecure telephone! Wonder where Nuland got the idea that was all right.

“Only transmitting and sharing classified information via email through the secure email and internet system used by the U.S. government also prevents accidental transmission of secret information to people who should not receive secret information. It’s a closed system. Only those with the approved clearance and an authorized email account can receive the email. So you can’t accidentally type in the wrong name of a contact who is not trusted, is not a U.S. citizen,

does not have a security clearance, etc. and send them an email with classified information.

“We’ve all done that with our email, type in the wrong name and send someone an email by accident. Or we’ve forwarded an email string with a chain of information somewhere down the body of the message that you didn’t want the recipient to see. By transmitting classified information via her personal email account Hilary Clinton could have very easily sent classified information to someone by accident. Of course, as everyone who uses email knows, once you send a message you have no control over where that message gets sent after you hit send. So, once she forwarded an email with classified information that information could be sent to anyone, anywhere in the world whether on purpose or on accident. That’s why you don’t transmit classified information outside the secure system.

“Another question: What information regarding her dealings outside of her official capacities may have been targeted? What I mean is besides U.S. government secrets that she possibly exposed were Clinton’s own secrets – perhaps a quid pro quo or two regarding foreign donations to the Clinton Foundation. Such information could be used against her as political blackmail. What information could have been captured by a foreign power that could be used if/when Hillary Clinton came to office as President to gain leverage over her?

“Undoubtedly, if she wins election, her first priority will be re-election. So, my concern is not just for information that she could have compromised as Secretary of State that would have harmed the U.S. from 2009-2013, but what information has been compromised that could be used against her as blackmail if she is in the Oval Office?”

Clinton’s Judgment

So whether Sen. Sanders is right or not – that “the American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn emails” – Hillary Clinton’s carelessness and entitlement in brushing aside the lawful security rules that apply to other government officials is an issue that bears on whether she has the character and judgment to be President.

In December 2011, when then-Secretary of State Clinton was busy denouncing Pvt. Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning for leaking evidence of U.S. government wrongdoing, Clinton declared: “I think that in an age where so much information is flying through cyberspace, we all have to be aware of the fact that some information which is sensitive, which does affect the security of individuals and relationships, deserves to be protected and we will continue to take necessary steps to do so.”

For leaking mostly low-level classified information to the public so the people could know about illegal or questionable acts by the government – none of the data top secret, the level that some Clinton emails have now been stamped – Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

But it seems that the applicable legal standard – or double standard – is that the more sensitive the security breach and the higher the status of the offender the lighter the punishment. For instance, Gen. David Petraeus divulged top-secret/code-word information to his biographer/mistress and lied to the FBI about it, but received only a misdemeanor citation (a fine and probation but no jail time) for mishandling classified material.

If that pattern is followed – and since Secretary of State Clinton outranked Gen. Petraeus – she might well expect even more lenient treatment, but her behavior might be something that the American voters would want to consider before giving her a promotion to U.S. President.

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

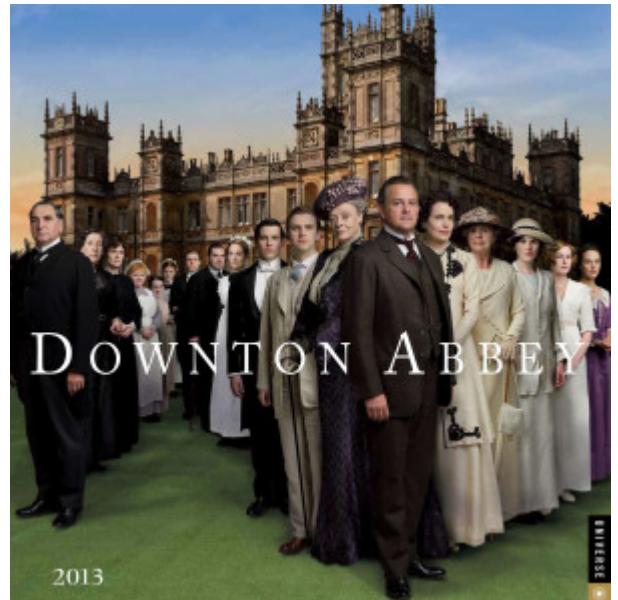
The ‘Downton Abbey’ Generals

As Official Washington lusts for a new Cold War all the better to fleece the taxpayers on behalf of the Military-Industrial Complex there are also smaller perks that the powerful prefer, like U.S. generals having enlisted soldiers perform as their personal servants like the wait staff on “Downton Abbey,” notes Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

If there is one refrain that officials at the Department of Defense repeat with dogged persistence, it is that our military is underfunded. DOD testimony to Congress brims over with references to budget cuts. This meme has spread to the point where many in the public think that we spend too little on defense. Republican presidential candidates certainly talk as if they believe it.

This is despite the fact that the Pentagon’s budget has nearly doubled since 9/11. Adjusted for inflation, we are spending substantially more on the military than the average Pentagon budget during the Cold War.



A related complaint is a purported lack of military personnel. As the saying goes, the military is “stretched thin” and has to “do more with less.” Accordingly, several candidates would increase the “end strength” (the congressionally authorized personnel numbers) of the various services.

After hearing this unremitting dirge about military austerity, it may come as a surprise to learn that the Army is soliciting its troops to become full-time aides to generals. What does this involve? According to the *Army Times*, “duties typically include:

- Maintaining the general’s uniforms.
- Planning and executing official military social events.
- Daily meal preparation, to include menu development, shopping and storing of rations.
- Administrative requirements and record-keeping of finances.
- Household management, to include the upkeep of a general’s assigned quarters.
- Perform other tasks that assist the general in the performance of his or her official duties.”

Translated into plain English, the Army is looking for Mr. Carson from *Downton Abbey*, with our generals playing the role of the Earl of Grantham. Given that there are around 300 U.S. Army generals, this means that a similar number of enlisted personnel is involved. The equivalent number of soldiers could fill out the combat slots for two full infantry companies, which makes you wonder about the Army’s priorities.

When then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney ordered a comprehensive privatization of military logistics in 1992, support functions like Army mess halls were

privatized. As a consequence, our military cannot feed itself, and must rely on contractors like Halliburton (of which Cheney, conveniently, was CEO from 1995 to 2000) for meals, including in combat zones. Even what formerly counted as core military functions, like guarding military installations, are now largely privatized. Yet preparing canapés for a dinner party is a core military mission that cannot be privatized.

Does a general, in addition to free lodging not subject to taxation and subsidized food, need a full-time government-supplied servant? If the social whirl in which they engage is so exhausting, perhaps a caterer could supply the eats and booze.

Members of Congress, by the way, are prohibited from using their publicly paid staff for purely personal tasks. Although this rule is sometimes honored more in the breach than the observance, former Congressman Jim Traficant landed in the federal slammer for (among other charges) using his staff to do chores at his home.

Perhaps there is the perception that a general, with a salary limited by statute, needs this perk in view of responsibilities vastly greater than his paycheck. Unfortunately, the image of Cincinnatus, the Roman commander who returned to his plow once victory was won, has faded.

General Robert E. Lee, it is said, lived out his life in near penury, refusing to shill as a product endorser because it would mean cashing in on the blood his men had spilled. George C. Marshall, America's organizer of victory in World War II, also spent his retirement following the stern code of a soldier in a constitutional republic.

Now the overwhelming drive among general and flag officers is to cash in. As it is with so many congressmen and executive branch officials, their time in office is really just a stepping stone to making a killing.

Just as Robert Rubin and Trent Lott profited beyond the dreams of avarice after leaving government service, General David Petraeus, despite the embarrassing denouement to his career, became a partner at Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. L.P., a Wall Street leveraged buyout firm. His previous experience in investment banking is doubtful, but obviously KKR was in the market for a Beltway-connected door opener.

Petraeus is the exception in one respect: about 70 percent of his colleagues end up in the executive suites or board rooms of the very defense contractors they were supposed to have kept honest during their military careers.

According to a 2011 Bloomberg News article, "The top 10 U.S. defense contractors

have 30 retired senior officers or former national security officials serving on their boards. Press releases issued by those companies since 2008 announced the hiring of almost two dozen prominent flag officers or senior officials as high-ranking executives.” The article also states that senior executives at the largest U.S. defense contractors are paid from \$1 million to \$11 million a year.

Beyond the fact that the Army, if we believe its doomsaying about its budget, can't spare valuable active-duty personnel for a frivolous activity, and that generals are not exactly underpaid, there is something degrading about the whole business. The tradition of military commanders being fawned over by uniformed servants is a hangover from the feudal-aristocratic tradition of Europe, when officers were noblemen and the troops were considered, in the testimony of the Duke of Wellington, “the scum of the earth, enlisted for drink.”

It is hardly fitting for a democratic republic to think of generals as nobility or of soldiers as servants. It's time to end this silly anachronism.

Mike Lofgren is a former congressional staff member who served on the House and Senate budget committees. His new book, *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government*, appeared January 5, 2016.
