

Obama's Deadly Afghan Acquiescence

From his first days, President Obama showed a lack of guts when confronted by powerful insiders. He backed down even when that meant squandering U.S. soldiers in the futile Afghan War "surges," says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern.

Occasionally a *New York Times* writer like Mark Landler will be permitted to step up to the plate and write a sensible article about President "No Guts Obama" and how he caved in to folks whom he lacked the political courage to cross.

Landler's Jan. 1 article shows, among other things, how Obama's bowing to heavyweights like Gen. David Petraeus, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ended up getting thousands of people killed and prolonging the fool's-errand Afghan war.

The pity, of course, is that Landler's piece, "[The Afghan War and the Evolution of Obama](#)," comes eight years too late. There is a lot of numbness out there today about how we were all had by "NGO," together with attempts to blame bad decisions on his benighted advisers. But you know where the buck is supposed to stop. And a number of us, including Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), spared no effort to get through to him in "real time."

I can understand that some of you will not want to risk being further depressed. Others, however, may wish to be reminded of our efforts to warn President Obama before he let himself be conned into doubling down on the Afghan folly. Those others may want to skim through the re-runs (linked below) of early warnings in March 2009 and January 2010, together with some retrospective comments.

On March 28, 2009, as Obama was beginning his plunge into the Afghan War swamp, I wrote an article entitled, "[Welcome to Vietnam, Mr. President](#)," which Consortiumnews.com republished last year with the intro: "With still no end in sight for the Afghan War, President Obama can't say he wasn't warned. Barely two months into his presidency in 2009, ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern welcomed Obama to his own Vietnam quagmire."

Included in that piece was this passage: "Equally relevant to Obama's fateful early decision on Afghanistan, Gen. Douglas MacArthur told another young President in April 1961: 'Anyone wanting to commit American ground forces to the mainland of Asia should have his head examined.'"

The truth of that advice even eventually sunk into the fellow whom we at the CIA

used to call “windsock Bobby Gates” in the days when he was starting his bureaucratic climb to the top by tailoring his positions to please his superiors.

Though Gates helped maneuver Obama into a pointless Afghan “counterinsurgency surge” in fall 2009, Gates later told aspiring officers at West Point: “Any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined,’ as General [Douglas] MacArthur so delicately put it.”

My “Welcome to Vietnam, Mr. President” article of March 28, 2009, also noted: “When JFK’s top military advisers, critical of the President’s reluctance to go against [MacArthur’s] advice, virtually called him a traitor – for pursuing a negotiated solution to the fighting in Laos, for example – Kennedy would tell them to convince Gen. MacArthur first, and then come back to him. (Alas, there seems to be no comparable Gen. MacArthur today.)”

Leaked Doubts

On Jan. 27, 2010, I was back at it again, citing the belated disclosure that U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry had tried to warn President Obama against escalating the Afghan War. I wrote:

“I imagine that in years to come, Eikenberry will proudly show his cables to his grandchildren. Or maybe he won’t, out of fear that one of them might ask why he didn’t have the guts to quit and let the rest of the country know what he thought of this latest March of Folly.”

Eikenberry is an interesting case study showing, among other things, that lack of guts on the part of a commander-in-chief can be contagious. A retired Lt. General and then Obama’s ambassador in Kabul, Eikenberry knew more about Afghanistan than the so-called “Gang of Five” – Gen. Petraeus, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Defense Secretary Gates, Secretary of State Clinton, and special envoy Richard Holbrooke – put together.

Eikenberry sent back to Washington some very important, sensible advice, though we don’t know whether Clinton forwarded the cables on to her boss. Nor do we know whether Eikenberry exercised his ambassadorial prerogative to contact the President directly.

Eikenberry had served three years in Afghanistan over the course of two separate tours of duty. During 2002-2003, he was responsible for rebuilding Afghan security forces. He then served 18 months (2005-2007) as commander of all U.S. forces stationed in the country. Surely, he could see the toll in killed and wounded that would inevitably result from the hopeless counterinsurgency

strategy being urged on “NGO” by the “Gang of Five.”

And Eikenberry’s cables show that he felt strongly about it. He also knew, of course, that Obama was about to let himself be sandbagged by the Gang and its clever use of the media. So he sent two *SECRET NODIS* (“NODIS” means No Dissemination) cables to Clinton, who was his boss (and who – along with Gates – was one of what Gates called the “un-fireables”). Eikenberry surely doubted that Clinton would share his advice with Obama, but did Eikenberry ever think of resigning loudly on principle? Apparently not.

So, what did he do when he was overruled? He trod up to Congress and fully supported the feckless surge of troops launched out of the cowardice/stupidity of “NGO” in bowing to the “Gang of Five.” It probably never occurred to Eikenberry to blow the whistle on the “tough guy/gal” policy which would end up getting a thousand or so U.S. troops killed along with a much larger number of Afghans.

For many a graduate of West Point, the academy’s motto seems to get garbled as they climb the ladder of success. Instead of “Duty, Honor, Country,” it becomes “Career, President, Sinecure Retirement.” Perhaps blowing the whistle did occur to Eikenberry. But if you challenge the Establishment in that way, you seldom end up with a cushy job like running a Research Center at Stanford.

Presumably, Eikenberry takes some gratification now in the fact that he turns out to have been correct in his bleak assessment of the “surge” in Afghanistan. He may even have been the one behind eventually leaking his cables to The New York Times, thus earning him applause from his academic colleagues.

But his burnished credentials didn’t save the lives of the soldiers tossed into the Afghan meat grinder or the many civilians who died needlessly as senior U.S. government officials put ideology and careerism – the need to look tough – ahead of what made sense for either Afghanistan or the United States.

In the end, however, the bloody futility of the past eight years in Afghanistan rest most heavily on the “Gang of Five” and the easily outmaneuvered “NGO,” who sits at the desk where the buck stops.

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 CIA analyst for a total of 30 years, and is now a member of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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

Welcome to Vietnam, Mr. President

From the Archive: With still no end in sight for the Afghan War, President Obama can't say he wasn't warned. Barely two months into his presidency in 2009, ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern welcomed Obama to his own Vietnam quagmire.

By Ray McGovern (Originally published March 28, 2009)

I was wrong. I had been saying that it would be naïve to take too seriously presidential candidate Barack Obama's rhetoric regarding the need to escalate the war in Afghanistan.

I kept thinking to myself that when he got briefed on the history of Afghanistan and the oft-proven ability of Afghan "militants" to drive out foreign invaders – from Alexander the Great, to the Persians, the Mongolians, Indians, British, Russians – he would be sure to understand why they call mountainous Afghanistan the "graveyard of empires."

And surely he would be fully briefed on the stupidity and deceit that left 58,000 U.S. troops – not to mention 2 million to 3 million Vietnamese – dead in Vietnam.

John Kennedy became President the year Obama was born. One cannot expect toddler-to-teenager Barack to remember much about the war in Vietnam, and it was probably too early for that searing, controversial experience to have found its way into the history texts as he was growing up.

But he was certainly old enough to absorb the fecklessness and brutality of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. And his instincts at that time were good enough to see through the Bush administration's duplicity.

And, with him now in the White House, surely some of his advisers would be able to brief him on both Vietnam and Iraq, and prevent him from making similar mistakes – this time in Afghanistan. Or so I thought.

Deflecting an off-the-topic question at his March 24, 2009 press conference, Obama said, "I think that the last 64 days has been dominated by me trying to figure out how we're going to fix the economy. ... Right now the American people are judging me exactly the way I should be judged, and that is, are we taking the steps to improve liquidity in the financial markets, create jobs, get

businesses to reopen, keep America safe?"

Okay, it is understandable that President Obama has been totally absorbed with the financial crisis. But surely, unlike predecessors supposedly unable to do two things at the same time, our resourceful new President certainly could find enough time to solicit advice from a wide circle, get a better grip on the huge stakes in Afghanistan, and arrive at sensible decisions. Or so I thought.

Getting Railroaded?

It proved to be a bit awkward Friday morning waiting for the President to appear – a half-hour late for his own presentation. Was he for some reason reluctant?

Perhaps he had a sense of being railroaded by his advisers. Perhaps he paused on learning that just a few hours earlier a soldier of the Afghan army shot dead two U.S. troops and wounded a third before killing himself, and that Taliban fighters had stormed an Afghan police post and killed 10 police earlier that morning.

Should he weave that somehow into his speech?

Or maybe it was learning of the Taliban ambush of a police convoy which wounded seven other policemen; or the suicide bomber in the Afghan border area of Pakistan who demolished a mosque packed with hundreds of worshippers attending Friday prayers, killing some 50 and injuring scores more, according to preliminary reports.

Or, more simply, perhaps Obama's instincts told him he was about to do something he will regret. Maybe that's why he was embarrassingly late in coming to the podium. One look at the national security advisers arrayed behind the President was enough to see wooden-headedness.

In her classic book, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*, historian Barbara Tuchman described this mindset: "Wooden-headedness assesses a situation in terms of preconceived fixed notions, while ignoring or rejecting any contrary signs ... acting according to the wish while not allowing oneself to be deflected by the facts."

Tuchman pointed to 16th Century Philip II of Spain as a kind of Nobel laureate of wooden-headedness. Comparisons can be invidious, but the thing about Philip was that he drained state revenues by failed adventures overseas, leading to Spain's decline.

It is wooden-headedness, in my view, that permeates the "comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" that the President announced when he

finally did arrive. Author Tuchman points succinctly to what flows from wooden-headedness:

“Once a policy has been adopted and implemented, all subsequent activity becomes an effort to justify it. ... Adjustment is painful. For the ruler it is easier, once he has entered the policy box, to stay inside. For the lesser official it is better not to make waves, not to press evidence that the chief will find painful to accept. Psychologists call the process of screening out discordant information ‘cognitive dissonance,’ an academic disguise for ‘Don’t confuse me with the facts.’”

It seems only right and fitting that Barbara Tuchman’s daughter, Jessica Tuchman Mathews, president of the Carnegie Foundation, has shown herself to be inoculated against “cognitive dissonance.”

A January 2009 Carnegie report on Afghanistan concluded, **“The only meaningful way to halt the insurgency’s momentum is to start withdrawing troops. The presence of foreign troops is the most important element driving the resurgence of the Taliban.”**

In any case, Obama explained his decision on more robust military intervention in Afghanistan as a result of a “careful policy review” by military commanders and diplomats, the Afghani and Pakistani governments, NATO allies, and international organizations.

No Estimate? No Problem

Know why he did not mention a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) assessing the likely effects of this slow surge in troops and trainers? Because there is none. Guess why. The reason is the same one accounting for the lack of a completed NIE before the “surge” in troop strength in Iraq in early 2007.

Apparently, Obama’s advisers did not wish to take the risk that honest analysts – ones who had been around a while, and maybe even knew something of Vietnam and Iraq, as well as Afghanistan – might also be immune to “cognitive dissonance,” and ask hard questions regarding the basis of the new strategy.

Indeed, they might reach the same judgment they did in the April 2006 NIE on global terrorism. The authors of that estimate had few cognitive problems and simply declared their judgment that invasions and occupations (in 2006 the target then was Iraq) do not make us safer but lead instead to an upsurge in terrorism.

The prevailing attitude this time fits the modus operandi of Gen. David Petraeus, who late last year took the lead by default with the following

approach: We know best, and can run our own policy review, thank you very much.

Which he did, without requesting the formal NIE that typically precedes and informs key policy decisions. It is highly regrettable that President Obama was deprived of the chance to benefit from a formal estimate. Recent NIEs have been relatively bereft of wooden-headedness. Obama might have made a more sensible decision on how to proceed in Afghanistan.

As one might imagine, NIEs can, and should, play a key role in such circumstances, with a premium on objectivity and courage in speaking truth to power. That is precisely why Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair appointed Chas Freeman to head the National Intelligence Council, the body that prepares NIEs – and why the Likud Lobby got him ousted.

Estimates on Vietnam

As one of the intelligence analysts watching Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, I worked on several of the NIEs produced before and during the war. Sensitive ones bore this unclassified title: “Probable Reactions to Various Courses of Action With Respect to North Vietnam.”

Typical of the kinds of question the President and his advisers wanted addressed were: Can we seal off the Ho Chi Minh Trail by bombing? If the U.S. were to introduce X thousand additional troops into South Vietnam, will Hanoi quit? Okay, how about XX thousand? Our answers regularly earned us brickbats from the White House for not being “good team players.” But in those days we labored under a strong ethos dictating that we give it to policymakers straight, without fear or favor. We had career protection for doing that. Our judgments (the unwelcome ones, anyway) were often pooh-poohed as negativism. Policymakers, of course, were in no way obliged to take them into account, and often didn’t.

The point is that they continued to be sought. Not even Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon would decide on a significant escalation without seeking our best estimate as to how U.S. adversaries would likely react to this or that escalatory step.

So, hats off, I suppose, to you, Gen. Petraeus and those who helped you elbow the substantive intelligence analysts off to the sidelines.

What might intelligence analysts have said on the key point of training the Afghan army and police? We will never know, but it is a safe bet those analysts who know something about Afghanistan (or about Vietnam) would roll their eyes and wish Petraeus luck.

As for Iraq, what remains to be seen is against whom the various sectarian

factions target their weapons and put their training into practice.

The Training Mirage

In his Afghanistan policy speech, Obama mentioned training 11 times. To those of us with some gray in our hair, this was all too reminiscent of the prevailing rhetoric at the start of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

In February 1964, with John Kennedy dead and President Lyndon Johnson improvising on Vietnam, then-Defense Secretary Robert McNamara prepared a major policy speech on defense, leaving out Vietnam, and sent it to the President to review. The Johnson tapes show the President finding fault:

LBJ: "I wonder if you shouldn't find two minutes to devote to Vietnam."

McN: "The problem is what to say about it."

LBJ: "I would say that we have a commitment to Vietnamese freedom. ... Our purpose is to train the [South Vietnamese] people, and our training's going good."

But our training was not going good then. And specialists who know Afghanistan, its various tribes and demographics tell me that training is not likely to go good there either. Ditto for training in Pakistan.

Obama's alliterative rhetoric aside, it is going to be no easier to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat" Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan with more combat forces and training than it was to defeat the Viet Cong with these same tools in Vietnam.

Obama seemed to be protesting a bit too much: "Going forward, we will not blindly stay the course." No sir.

There will be "metrics to measure progress and hold ourselves accountable!" Yes, sir!

And he will enlist wide international support from countries like Russia, India and China that, according to President Obama, "should have a stake in the security of the region." Right.

"The road ahead will be long," said Obama in conclusion. He has that right. The strategy adopted virtually guarantees that.

That is why Gen. David McKiernan, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan publicly contradicted his boss, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, in late 2008 when Gates, protesting the widespread pessimism on Afghanistan, started talking up the prospect of a "surge" of troops in Afghanistan.

McKiernan insisted publicly that no Iraqi-style “surge” of forces would end the conflict in Afghanistan. “The word I don’t use for Afghanistan is ‘surge,’” McKiernan stated, adding that what is required is a “sustained commitment” that could last many years and would ultimately require a political, not military, solution.

McKiernan has that right. But his boss Mr. Gates did not seem to get it.

Bob Gates at the Gate

In late 2008, as he maneuvered to stay on as Defense Secretary in the new administration, Gates hotly disputed the notion that things were getting out of control in Afghanistan. The argument that Gates used to support his professed optimism, however, made us veteran intelligence officers gag – at least those who remember the U.S. in Vietnam in the 1960s, the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and other failed counterinsurgencies.

“The Taliban holds no land in Afghanistan, and loses every time it comes into contact with coalition forces,” Gates explained.

Our Secretary of Defense seemed to be insisting that U.S. troops have not lost one pitched battle with the Taliban or Al Qaeda. (Engagements like the one on July 13, 2008, in which “insurgents” attacked an outpost in Konar province, killing nine U.S. soldiers and wounding 15 others, apparently do not qualify as “contact.”)

Gates ought to read up on Vietnam, for his words evoke a similarly benighted comment by U.S. Army Col. Harry Summers after that war had been lost. In 1974, Summers was sent to Hanoi to try to resolve the status of Americans still listed as missing. To his North Vietnamese counterpart, Col. Tu, Summers made the mistake of bragging, “You know, you never beat us on the battlefield.”

Colonel Tu responded, “That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.”

I don’t fault the senior military. Cancel that, I DO fault them. They resemble all too closely the gutless general officers who never looked down at what was really happening in Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the time have been called, not without reason, “a sewer of deceit.”

The current crew is in better odor. And one may be tempted to make excuses for them, noting for example that if admirals/generals are the hammer, small wonder that to them everything looks like a nail. No, that does not excuse them.

The ones standing in back of Obama on Friday have smarts enough to have said, NO; IT’S A BAD IDEA, Mr. President. That should not be too much to expect.

Gallons of blood are likely to be poured unnecessarily in the mountains and valleys of Afghanistan – probably over the next decade or longer. But not their blood.

Sound Military Advice

General officers seldom rise to the occasion. Exceptions are so few that they immediately spring to mind: French war hero Gen. Philippe LeClerc, for example, was sent to Indochina right after World War II with orders to report back on how many troops it would take to recapture Indochina. His report: “It would require 500,000 men; and even with 500,000 France could not win.”

Equally relevant to Obama’s fateful decision, Gen. Douglas MacArthur told another young President in April 1961: **“Anyone wanting to commit American ground forces to the mainland of Asia should have his head examined.”**

When JFK’s top military advisers, critical of the President’s reluctance to go against that advice, virtually called him a traitor – for pursuing a negotiated solution to the fighting in Laos, for example – Kennedy would tell them to convince Gen. MacArthur first, and then come back to him. (Alas, there seems to be no comparable Gen. MacArthur today.)

Kennedy recognized Vietnam as a potential quagmire, and was determined not to get sucked in – despite the misguided, ideologically-salted advice given him by Ivy League patricians like McGeorge Bundy. Kennedy’s military adviser, Gen. Maxwell Taylor said later that MacArthur’s statement made a “hell of an impression on the President.”

MacArthur made another comment about the situation that President Kennedy had ***inherited*** in Indochina. This one struck the young President so much that he dictated it into a memorandum of conversation: Kennedy quoted MacArthur as saying to him, “The chickens are coming home to roost from the Eisenhower years, and you live in the chicken coop.”

Well, the chickens are coming home to roost after eight years of Cheney and Bush, but there is no sign that President Obama is listening to anyone capable of fresh thinking on Afghanistan. Obama has apparently decided to stay in the chicken coop. And that can be called, well, chicken.

Can’t say I actually KNEW Jack Kennedy, but it was he who got so many of us down here to Washington to explore what we might do for our country. Kennedy **resisted** the kind of pressures to which President Obama has now succumbed. (There are even some, like Jim Douglass in his book *JFK and the Unspeakable*, who conclude that this is what got President Kennedy killed.)

Mr. Obama, you need to find some advisers who are not still wet behind the ears and who are not brown noses – preferably some who have lived Vietnam and Iraq and have an established record of responsible, fact-based analysis.

You would also do well to read Douglass's book, and to page through the "Pentagon Papers," instead of trying to emulate the Lincoln portrayed in *Team of Rivals*. I, too, am a big fan of Doris Kearns Goodwin, but Daniel Ellsberg is an author far more relevant and nourishing for this point in time. Read his *Secrets*, and recognize the signs of the times.

There is still time to put the brakes on this disastrous policy. One key lesson of Vietnam is that an army trained and supplied by foreign occupiers can almost always be readily outmatched and out-waited in a guerrilla war, no matter how many billions of dollars are pumped in.

Professor Martin van Creveld of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the only non-American military historian on the U.S. Army's list of required reading for officers, has accused former President George W. Bush of "launching the most foolish war since Emperor Augustus in 9 BC sent his legions into Germany and lost them."

Please do not feel you have to compete with your predecessor for such laurels.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. In the 1960s, he served as an infantry/intelligence officer and then became a CIA analyst for the next 27 years. He is on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Is Hillary Clinton 'Honest'?

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton's defenders object to the widespread public view that she is a liar by noting she scores reasonably well on the accuracy of her policy statements, but that is missing the point, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof has offered a curious defense of Hillary Clinton's "honesty," refuting the public's widespread view that she is a liar by narrowly defining what it means to be "honest" and arguing that she is less dishonest than she is a calculating and corner-cutting politician.

Kristof writes, “as we head toward the general election showdown, by all means denounce Hillary Clinton’s judgment and policy positions, but let’s focus on the real issues. She’s not a saint but a politician, and to me this notion that she’s fundamentally dishonest is a bogus narrative.”

Kristof cites, for instance, that half of her campaign statements, as evaluated by PolitiFact, were rated either true or mostly true, comparable to how the group assessed statements by Sen. Bernie Sanders and Sen. Ted Cruz and much better than Donald Trump’s 22 percent. Leaving aside the “conventional wisdom” bias of this mainstream media organization, Kristof does seem to have a point. In a narrow definition of “honesty,” former Secretary of State Clinton may be “truthful” or kind of truthful half the time.

But Kristof misses the larger point that the American people are making when 56 percent of them rate her negatively and many call “crooked” and “dishonest.” They seem to be commenting on her lack of authenticity and perhaps her resistance to sincerely acknowledging major errors in judgment. She only grudgingly apologized for her pro-Iraq War vote and still insists that her bloody “regime change” scheme for Libya was a good idea, even as the once-prosperous North African nation slides into anarchy and deprivation – with the chief beneficiary the head-choppers of the Islamic State.

A Nixonian Quality

Many Americans sense that there is a Nixonian quality to Hillary Clinton – her excessive secrecy, her defensiveness, her rigidity, her unwillingness to acknowledge or learn from mistakes. Even when she is forced into admitting a “mistake,” such as her violation of State Department rules when she maintained a private email server for official correspondence, she acts as if she’s just “apologizing” to close off further debate or examination. As with Richard Nixon, there’s a feeling that Clinton’s apologies and rationales are self-serving, not forthcoming.

Yet, while it’s true that Nixon was a deceitful character – his most famous lie being when he declared “I am not a crook” – I would argue that he had some clear advantages over Clinton as President. He was a much more strategic thinker than she is – and sometimes went against the grain of expectations as encapsulated in the phrase “Nixon goes to China,” meaning that Nixon could open up to communist China precisely because he was viewed as such a hardliner who would never do such a thing but who finally judged that the move was in America’s interests.

While it’s impossible to say whether Clinton would seize unexpected openings as President, she showed none of that creativity, subtlety and courage as Secretary of State. She marched down a straightforward neocon line, doing precisely what

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted in the Middle East.

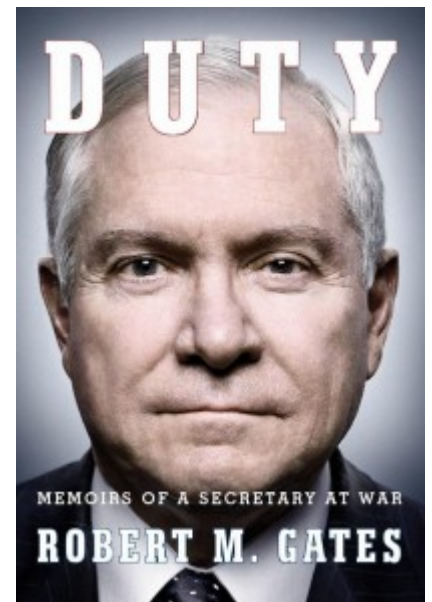
Clinton tried to sabotage President Barack Obama's diplomatic outreach to Iran and favored military solutions to Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. She also followed a rightist approach in backing the 2009 coup in Honduras that ousted an elected progressive president who had offended some of the Honduran oligarchs and outside corporate interests.

Lack of Self-Criticism

In addition, Clinton appears to have learned nothing from her support for the catastrophic Iraq War and has argued against "conflating" her Iraq decision with her Libya decision. But that suggests that she is incapable of learning a lesson from one mistake and applying it to a similar situation, an almost disqualifying characteristic for someone who hopes to become President.

Being a successful President requires extracting painful lessons from one mistake and making sure you don't make the same mistake again. But Clinton's personal arrogance or defensiveness (it's hard to figure out which is dominant) prevents her from that sort of self-criticism.

Indeed, her ritualistic (and politically timed) apology for her Iraq War vote in 2006 came across less as an honest recognition that she had done something horribly wrong than that she had to say something to appease a furious Democratic electorate as she mounted her first run for President against anti-Iraq War candidate Obama.



After losing to Obama and becoming his Secretary of State, she privately hedged her Iraq War apology by saying privately that she thought that President George W. Bush's "surge" in Iraq was successful and admitting that she had only opposed it in 2007 for political reasons, according to former Defense Secretary Robert

Gates in his memoir, *Duty*.

On Oct. 26, 2009, as Gates – a holdover from the Bush administration – and Clinton joined forces to pressure Obama into approving a similar “surge” for Afghanistan, Gates recalled a meeting in which Clinton made what he regarded as a stunning admission, writing:

“The exchange that followed was remarkable. In strongly supporting the surge in Afghanistan, Hillary told the president that her opposition to the surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary [in 2008]. She went on to say, ‘The Iraq surge worked.’

“The president conceded vaguely that opposition to the Iraq surge had been political. To hear the two of them making these admissions, and in front of me, was as surprising as it was dismaying.” (Obama’s aides disputed Gates’s suggestion that the President indicated that his opposition to the Iraq “surge” was political, noting that he had always opposed the Iraq War. The Clinton team has not challenged Gates’s account.)

But the exchange, as recounted by Gates, indicates that Clinton not only let her political needs dictate her position on an important national security issue, but that she accepts as true the superficial conventional wisdom about the “successful surge” in Iraq, which claimed the lives of about 1,000 American soldiers and a much larger number of Iraqis but failed its principal mission of buying time for the Iraqis to resolve their sectarian differences.

So, when one considers Hillary Clinton’s “honesty” more should be in play than simply whether she accurately describes her policy positions half the time. Honesty, as most people would perceive it, relates to a person’s fundamental integrity, strength of character, readiness to acknowledge mistakes and ability to learn from them. On that measure, the American people seem to have sized up Hillary Clinton pretty well.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon.”](#)]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

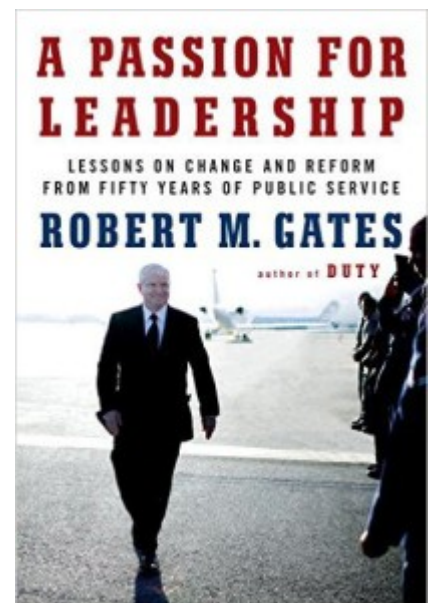
The Reality of Robert Gates

Official Washington hails Robert Gates as one of its Wise Men and the former CIA director and defense secretary clearly concurs as he shows in his new book but the reality is far less complimentary, as ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman describes.

By Melvin A. Goodman

Former CIA Director and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who served both Bush administrations as well as the Obama administration, has produced his third self-aggrandizing memoir. His most recent effort, *A Passion for Leadership*, is in the form of lessons learned, but there is no acknowledgement of any flaw or stumble, let alone mistake.

Gates writes, "A leader, or those who aspire to that role, regardless of whether in the public or the private sector, must have integrity." Yet, in view of Gates' emphasis on "integrity," it's useful to review his CIA career, particularly his relationship with CIA Director William Casey.



First, there is virtually no discussion of the fact that President Ronald Reagan nominated Gates to be the director of central intelligence in 1987, but his duplicity on the Iran-Contra scandal meant he could not be confirmed. After his appearance before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. David Boren, the chairman of the committee, called Gates at home to report that too many members of the committee simply didn't believe his denials of prior knowledge of the illegal Iran-Contra covert action (which involved secretly selling weapons to Iran with some proceeds going to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels).

Sen. Boren even called Lawrence Walsh, the independent counsel investigating Iran-Contra, to ascertain whether Gates would be indicted. Walsh "doubted Gates' veracity," but said he would "probably not" be indicted. Walsh warned Boren, however, that there were still troubling areas indicating that Gates falsely denied knowledge of Colonel Oliver North's Contra-support activities. North was Bill Casey's "case officer" for Iran-Contra.

Walsh knew that Gates had been informed of the illegal "arms-for-profit deal," but Gates continues to claim that he had been "kept in the dark" and doesn't remember any conversations that gave him advance knowledge. Walsh's report included ten pages on Gates, concluding that there was "insufficient evidence" to warrant charging Robert Gates with a crime. But the report noted that the "statements of Gates often seemed scripted and less than candid."

In fact, it was Gates' deputy, Dick Kerr, as well as a senior intelligence officer, Charlie Allen, who had access to sensitive documents and briefed Gates on the sale of missiles to Iran and the diversion of profits to the Contras. North even briefed Gates on the Swiss bank accounts where the money for the Contras was kept.

A veteran CIA operative, Tom Polgar, wrote many members of the committee to remind them about Gates' role in Iran-Contra, and the "slanting of intelligence under the leadership of Casey and Gates." Nevertheless, Gates still pretends to be an innocent bystander in the Iran-Contra crisis, although he was on center stage at an important decision-making juncture.

In his book, Gates contends that he "was no lawyer and didn't even know if laws had been broken." It was well known at the CIA that the sale of surface-to-air missiles to Iran was a violation of congressional law and that, in any event, the profits of covert sales had to be turned back to the U.S. Treasury.

Actually, Gates played a key role in developing a national intelligence estimate in 1985 that provided the intelligence justification for selling arms to Iran, and referred to the congressional investigations of Iran-Contra as "bureaucratic bullshit" that Casey was determined to evade.

Three decades later, Gates acknowledges that Casey "orchestrated" Iran-Contra "in league with the national security adviser." During the hearings in 1991 and in his first memoir in 1996, Gates defended Casey throughout.

Even worse, Gates makes no mention of the fact that his confirmation as CIA director in 1991, when he was nominated for a second time, produced the most contentious and tumultuous vote on an intelligence official in the agency's history. Gates dismissed the committee hearings as a "food fight," but more than

30 senators voted against Gates, which was far greater than all votes for all previous directors.

In his memoir, Gates takes credit for his "self-discipline" in front of senators who "love to hear themselves talk," and for "keeping silent in the face of outrageous speeches." He goes on the attack only against the late Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, who not only voted against Gates, but read into the congressional record some of the more than 50 statements from CIA analysts who opposed Gates's confirmation.

"The analytic product improved substantially" during my "four years" as deputy director of intelligence," says Gates in 2016. This may be the most ludicrous aspect of Gates's memoir.

As Senator Bill Bradley remarked in explaining his vote against Gates, the director of intelligence was wrong about every major intelligence issue that marked the 1980s and President Reagan's two terms in office.

Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that the "corporate view" of the CIA under Gates "missed by a mile" and that the United States should not "gloss over the enormity of this failure to forecast the magnitude of the Soviet crisis."

There is no mention of Secretary of State George Shultz in the Gates' memoir, presumably because Shultz's memoir charged Gates with "manipulating" him and being "usually wrong" about the Soviet Union. The former secretary of state emphasized that he had been "misled, lied to, and cut out" by Casey and Gates.

I would only add that Gates was entirely wrong about Moscow and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, and he made sure that the CIA was wrong as well.

Two years after Shultz told Gates that "you have a big, powerful machine not under good control" and "I distrust what comes out of it," Secretary of State James Baker had his own confrontation with Gates. Gates was giving speeches that undermined Baker's policies, and the secretary threatened to go to President George H.W. Bush to stop Gates's efforts.

National security adviser Brent Scowcroft got the message and turned off Gates's polemics. Like Shultz, Baker is not mentioned in the memoir.

"At every level, a leader should strive to make his employees proud to be where they are and doing what they do," says Gates in 2016.

In my 24 years at the CIA, there was never the kind of toxic atmosphere that existed when Gates served as deputy director for intelligence, deputy director

of CIA, and finally director of CIA. Several Republican senators who supported Gates, including Warren Rudman and Intelligence Committee vice chairman Frank Murkowski, acknowledged Gates's imperious manner in their statements.

Chairman Boren believed he had to make a personal commitment and "indeed the commitment of our entire committee" that "no action will be taken against [Gates's critics] in a way that will disrupt or penalize their career advancement."

Boren said he would hold Gates "accountable and carefully scrutinize his decisions and actions to ensure that needed changes are made." Boren had no ability whatsoever to enforce such a commitment, and his colleagues on both sides of the aisle were nonplussed and chagrined that their chairman had gone out on the limb with a feckless gesture. Accordingly, nothing was done when some of Gates's critics suffered professionally as a result of their sworn affidavits, including vindictive polygraph examinations.

Perhaps if the Senate had done its job in 1991 and rejected the Gates's nomination as it was prepared to do in 1987 and if the Senate Intelligence Committee had pursued the warnings it received regarding politicization, then perhaps it would have been more difficult to politicize intelligence in the run-up to the Iraq War a decade later.

The Senate Intelligence Committee gave the benefit of the doubt to Bob Gates when it should have given the benefit to his critics. Unfortunately, there is no indication in *A Passion for Leadership* that Gates has learned any lessons from any of this.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA, National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism*, and the forthcoming *The Path to Dissent: A Whistleblower at CIA* (City Lights Publishers, 2015). Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org.

Hillary Clinton Seeks Neocon Shelter

Special Report: Stunned by falling poll numbers, Hillary Clinton is hoping that Democrats will rally to her neocon-oriented foreign policy and break with Bernie Sanders as insufficiently devoted to Israel. But will that hawkish strategy work this time, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In seeking to put Sen. Bernie Sanders on the defensive over his foreign policy positions, ex-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is embracing a neoconservative stance on the Middle East and gambling that her more hawkish approach will win over Democratic voters.

Losing ground in Iowa and New Hampshire in recent polls, the Clinton campaign has counterattacked against Sanders, targeting his sometimes muddled comments on the Mideast crisis, but Clinton's attack line suggests that Sanders isn't adequately committed to the positions of Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his American neocon acolytes.

Clinton's strategy is to hit Sanders for seeking a gradual normalization of relations with Iran, while Clinton has opted for the neocon position of demonizing Iran and siding with Israel and its quiet alliance with Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states that share Israel's animosity toward Shiite-ruled Iran.

By attaching herself to this neocon approach of hyping every conceivable offense by Iran while largely excusing the human rights crimes of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Sunni-run states, Clinton is betting that most Democratic voters share the neocon-dominated "group think" of Official Washington: "Iran-our-enemy, Israel/Saudi Arabia-our-friends."

She made similar calculations when she voted for and supported President George W. Bush's invasion and occupation of Iraq; when she sided with the neocons in pushing President Barack Obama to escalate the war in Afghanistan; and when she instigated "regime change" in Libya all policies that had dubious and dangerous outcomes. But she seems to still believe that she will benefit politically if she continues siding with the neocons and their "liberal interventionist" side-kicks.

On Thursday, the Clinton campaign put Sanders's suggestion of eventual diplomatic relations with Iran in the context of his lack of ardor toward defending Israel.

"Normal relations with Iran right now?" said Jake Sullivan, the campaign's senior policy adviser. "President Obama doesn't support that idea. And it's not at all clear why it is that Senator Sanders is suggesting it. Many of you know Iran has pledged the destruction of Israel."

Actually, the Clinton campaign is mischaracterizing Sanders's position as expressed in last Sunday's debate. Sanders opposed immediate diplomatic relations with Tehran.

“Understanding that Iran’s behavior in so many ways is something that we disagree with; their support of terrorism, the anti-American rhetoric that we’re hearing from their leadership is something that is not acceptable,” Sanders said. “Can I tell you that we should open an embassy in Tehran tomorrow? No, I don’t think we should.”

Standing with the Establishment

But the Clinton campaign’s distortions aside, there is the question of whether or not the Democratic base has begun to reject Official Washington’s whatever-Israel-wants orthodoxy.

Hillary Clinton seems to be betting that rank-and-file Democrats remain enthralled to Israel and afraid to challenge the powerful neocon propaganda machine that controls the U.S. establishment’s foreign policy by dominating major op-ed pages, TV political chat shows and leading think tanks. The neocons also maintain close ties to the “liberal interventionists” who hold down key jobs in the Obama administration.

Clinton’s gamble assumes that progressives and foreign-policy “realists” have failed to develop their own infrastructure for examining and debunking many of the neocon/liberal-hawk propaganda themes and thus any politician who deviates too far from those “group thinks” risks getting marginalized.

In other words, Clinton is counting on the establishment structure holding through Election 2016 despite the populist anger that is evident from the surge of support for democratic socialist Bernie Sanders on the left and for billionaire nativist Donald Trump on the right.

In effect, this election is asking American voters if they want incremental changes to the current system represented by establishment candidates such as Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush or if they want to shake the system up with insurgent candidates like Sanders and Trump.

Though most neocons are supporting Republican establishment candidates who have sworn allegiance to the Israeli/neocon cause, the likes of Sen. Marco Rubio, some prominent neocons have made clear that they would be happy with Hillary Clinton as president.

For instance, neocon superstar Robert Kagan told The New York Times in 2014 that he hoped that his neocon views which he now prefers to call “liberal interventionist” would prevail in a possible Hillary Clinton administration. After all, Secretary of State Clinton named Kagan to one of her State Department advisory boards and promoted his wife, neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland, who oversaw the

provocative “regime change” in Ukraine in 2014.

According to the Times’ article, Clinton “remains the vessel into which many interventionists are pouring their hopes.”

Kagan is quoted as saying: “I feel comfortable with her on foreign policy. If she pursues a policy which we think she will pursue it’s something that might have been called neocon, but clearly her supporters are not going to call it that; they are going to call it something else.”

Though Clinton recently has sought to portray herself as an Obama loyalist especially in South Carolina where she is counting on strong African-American support she actually has adopted far more hawkish positions than the President, both when she was a senator and as Obama’s first secretary of state.

‘Team of Rivals’ Debacle

Arguably, Obama’s most fateful decision of his presidency occurred shortly after the 2008 election when he opted for the trendy idea of a “team of rivals” to run his foreign policy. He left Bush family loyalist Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense, retained a neocon-dominated senior officer corps led by the likes of Gen. David Petraeus, and picked hawkish Sen. Hillary Clinton to be Secretary of State. Thus, Obama never took control of his own foreign policy.

The troika of Clinton-Gates-Petraeus challenged Obama over his desire to wind down the Afghan War, bureaucratically mouse-trapping him into an ill-advised “surge” that accomplished little other than getting another 1,750 U.S. soldiers killed along with many more Afghans. Nearly three-quarters of the 2,380 U.S. soldiers who died in Afghanistan were killed on Obama’s watch.

Ironically, it was Gates who shed the most light on Clinton’s neocon-oriented positions in his memoir, *Duty*, written after he left the Pentagon in 2011. While generally flattering Clinton for her like-minded positions, Gates also portrays Clinton as a pedestrian foreign policy thinker who is easily duped and leans toward military solutions.

Indeed, for thoughtful and/or progressive Democrats, the prospect of a President Hillary Clinton could represent a step back from some of President Barack Obama’s more innovative foreign policy strategies, particularly his readiness to cooperate with the Russians and Iranians to defuse Middle East tensions and his willingness to face down the Israel Lobby when it is pushing for heightened confrontations and war.

Based on her public record and Gates’s insider account, Clinton could be expected to favor a neoconservative approach to the Mideast, one more in line

with the dominant thinking of Official Washington and the belligerent dictates of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Standing with Israeli Bigots

As a U.S. senator and as Secretary of State, Clinton rarely challenged the conventional wisdom on the Mideast or resisted the use of military force to solve problems. She famously voted for the Iraq War in 2002 falling for President George W. Bush's bogus WMD case and remained a war supporter until her position became politically untenable during Campaign 2008.

Representing New York, Clinton avoided criticizing Israeli actions. In summer 2006, as Israeli warplanes pounded southern Lebanon, killing more than 1,000 Lebanese, Sen. Clinton shared a stage with Israel's bigoted Ambassador to the United Nations Dan Gillerman who had said, "While it may be true and probably is that not all Muslims are terrorists, it also happens to be true that nearly all terrorists are Muslim."

At a pro-Israel rally with Clinton in New York on July 17, 2006, Gillerman proudly defended Israel's massive violence against targets in Lebanon. "Let us finish the job," Gillerman told the crowd. "We will excise the cancer in Lebanon" and "cut off the fingers" of Hezbollah.

Responding to international concerns that Israel was using "disproportionate" force in bombing Lebanon and killing hundreds of civilians, Gillerman said, "You're damn right we are." [NYT, July 18, 2006]

Sen. Clinton did not protest Gillerman's remarks, since doing so would presumably have offended an important pro-Israel constituency, which she has continued to cultivate.

In November 2006, when President Bush nominated Gates to be Defense Secretary, Clinton gullibly misread the significance of the move. She interpreted it as a signal that the Iraq War was being wound down when it actually presaged the opposite, that an escalation or "surge" was coming.

From her seat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Clinton failed to penetrate the smokescreen around Gates's selection. The reality was that Bush had ousted Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in part, because he had sided with Generals John Abizaid and George Casey who favored shrinking the U.S. military footprint in Iraq. Gates was privately onboard for replacing those generals and expanding the U.S. footprint.

On with the Surge

After getting blindsided by Gates over what became a “surge” of 30,000 additional U.S. troops, Sen. Clinton sided with Democrats who objected to the escalation, but Gates quotes her in his memoir as later telling President Obama that she did so only for political reasons.

Gates recalled a meeting on Oct. 26, 2009, to discuss whether to authorize a similar “surge” in Afghanistan, a position favored by both Defense Secretary Gates and Secretary of State Clinton, who supported an even higher number of troops than Gates did. But the Afghan “surge” faced skepticism from Vice President Joe Biden and other White House staffers.

Gates wrote that he and Clinton “were the only outsiders in the session, considerably outnumbered by White House insiders. Obama said at the outset to Hillary and me, ‘It’s time to lay our cards on the table, Bob, what do you think?’ I repeated a number of the main points I had made in my memo to him [urging three brigades].

“Hillary agreed with my overall proposal but urged the president to consider approving the fourth brigade combat team if the allies wouldn’t come up with the troops.”

In *Duty*, Gates cited his collaboration with Clinton as crucial to his success in getting Obama to agree to the Afghan troop escalation and the expanded goal of counterinsurgency. Referring to Clinton, Gates wrote, “we would develop a very strong partnership, in part because it turned out we agreed on almost every important issue.”

The hawkish Gates-Clinton tandem helped counter the more dovish team including Vice President Biden, several members of the National Security Council staff and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, who tried to steer President Obama away from this deeper involvement.

Gates wrote, “I was confident that Hillary and I would be able to work closely together. Indeed, before too long, commentators were observing that in an administration where all power and decision making were gravitating to the White House, Clinton and I represented the only independent ‘power center,’ not least because, for very different reasons, we were both seen as ‘un-fireable.’”

Political Expediency

Gates also reported on what he regarded as a stunning admission by Clinton, writing: “The exchange that followed was remarkable. In strongly supporting the surge in Afghanistan, Hillary told the president that her opposition to the surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary [in 2008]. She went on to say, ‘The Iraq surge worked.’”

“The president conceded vaguely that opposition to the Iraq surge had been political. To hear the two of them making these admissions, and in front of me, was as surprising as it was dismaying.” (Obama’s aides disputed Gates’s suggestion that the President indicated that his opposition to the Iraq “surge” was political, noting that he had always opposed the Iraq War. The Clinton team did not challenge Gates’s account.)

But the exchange, as recounted by Gates, indicates that Clinton not only let her political needs dictate her position on an important national security issue, but that she accepts as true the superficial conventional wisdom about the “successful surge” in Iraq.

While that is indeed Official Washington’s beloved interpretation in part because influential neocons believe the “surge” rehabilitated their standing after the WMD fiasco and the disastrous Iraq War the reality is that the Iraq “surge” never achieved its stated goal of buying time to reconcile the country’s sectarian divides, which remain bloody to this day and helped create the conditions for the emergence of the Islamic State, which began as “Al Qaeda in Iraq.”

The truth that Hillary Clinton apparently doesn’t recognize is that the “surge” was only “successful” in that it delayed the ultimate American defeat until President Bush and his neocon cohorts had vacated the White House and the blame for the failure could be shifted, at least partly, to President Obama.

Other than sparing “war president” Bush the humiliation of having to admit defeat, the dispatching of 30,000 additional U.S. troops in early 2007 did little more than get nearly 1,000 additional Americans killed almost one-quarter of the war’s total U.S. deaths along with what certainly was a much higher number of Iraqis.

For example, WikiLeaks’s [“Collateral Murder.”](#) video depicted one 2007 scene during the “surge” in which U.S. firepower mowed down a group of Iraqi men, including two Reuters news staffers, walking down a street in Baghdad. The attack helicopters then killed a Good Samaritan, when he stopped his van to take survivors to a hospital, and severely wounded two children in the van.

The Unsuccessful Surge

A more rigorous analysis of what happened in Iraq in 2007-08 apparently beyond Hillary Clinton’s abilities or inclination would trace the decline in Iraqi sectarian violence mostly to strategies that predated the “surge” and were implemented in 2006 by Generals Casey and Abizaid.

Among their initiatives, Casey and Abizaid deployed a highly classified

operation to eliminate key Al Qaeda leaders, most notably the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006. Casey and Abizaid also exploited growing Sunni animosities toward Al Qaeda extremists by paying off Sunni militants to join the so-called "Awakening" in Anbar Province.

And, as the Sunni-Shiite sectarian killings reached horrendous levels in 2006, the U.S. military assisted in the *de facto* ethnic cleansing of mixed neighborhoods by helping Sunnis and Shiites move into separate enclaves, thus making the targeting of ethnic enemies more difficult. In other words, the flames of violence were likely to have abated whether Bush ordered the "surge" or not.

Radical Shiite leader Moktada al-Sadr also helped by issuing a unilateral cease-fire, reportedly at the urging of his patrons in Iran who were interested in cooling down regional tensions and speeding up the U.S. withdrawal. By 2008, another factor in the declining violence was the growing awareness among Iraqis that the U.S. military's occupation indeed was coming to an end. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki insisted on and got a firm timetable for American withdrawal from Bush.

Even author Bob Woodward, who had published best-sellers that praised Bush's early war judgments, concluded that the "surge" was only one factor and possibly not even a major one in the declining violence.

In his book, *The War Within*, Woodward wrote, "In Washington, conventional wisdom translated these events into a simple view: The surge had worked. But the full story was more complicated. At least three other factors were as important as, or even more important than, the surge."

Woodward, whose book drew heavily from Pentagon insiders, listed the Sunni rejection of Al Qaeda extremists in Anbar province and the surprise decision of al-Sadr to order a cease-fire as two important factors. A third factor, which Woodward argued may have been the most significant, was the use of new highly classified U.S. intelligence tactics that allowed for rapid targeting and killing of insurgent leaders.

However, in Washington, where the neocons remained very influential, the myth grew that Bush's "surge" had brought the violence under control. Gen. Petraeus, who took command of Iraq after Bush yanked Casey and Abizaid, was elevated into hero status as the military genius who achieved "victory at last" in Iraq (as Newsweek declared).

Buying Fallacies

Even the inconvenient truths that the United States was unceremoniously ushered

out of Iraq in 2011 and that Iraq's Shiite-Sunni divide widened into a chasm that has since spread divisions into Syria and even into Europe did not dent the cherished conventional wisdom about the "successful surge."

Yet, it is one thing for neocon pundits to promote such fallacies; it is another thing for the alleged Democratic front-runner for President in 2016 to believe this nonsense. And to say that she only opposed the "surge" out of a political calculation could border on disqualifying.

But the pattern fits with Clinton's previous decisions. She belatedly broke with the Iraq War during Campaign 2008 only when she realized that her hawkish stance was damaging her political chances against Obama, who had opposed the U.S. invasion in 2003.

Yet, as Secretary of State, Clinton sought to purge officials seen as insufficiently hawkish. After Obama hesitantly approved the Afghan "surge" and reportedly immediately regretted his decision Clinton took aim at Eikenberry, a retired general who had served in Afghanistan before being named ambassador.

Pressing for his removal, "Hillary had come to the meeting loaded for bear," Gates wrote. "She gave a number of specific examples of Eikenberry's insubordination to herself and her deputy. She said, 'He's a huge problem.'

"She went after the NSS [national security staff] and the White House staff, expressing anger at their direct dealings with Eikenberry and offering a number of examples of what she termed their arrogance, their efforts to control the civilian side of the war effort, their refusal to accommodate requests for meetings.

"As she talked, she became more forceful. 'I've had it,' she said, 'You want it [control of the civilian side of the war], I'll turn it all over to you and wash my hands of it. I'll not be held accountable for something I cannot manage because of White House and NSS interference.'"

However, when the protests failed to get Eikenberry and General Douglas Lute, a deputy national security adviser, fired, Gates concluded that they had the protection of President Obama and reflected his doubts about the Afghan War policy:

"It had become clear that Eikenberry and Lute, whatever their shortcomings, were under an umbrella of protection at the White House. With Hillary and me so adamant that the two should leave, that protection could come only from the president."

The Libya Fiasco

In 2011, Secretary of State Clinton also was a hawk on military intervention in Libya to oust (and ultimately kill) Muammar Gaddafi. However, on Libya, Defense Secretary Gates sided with the doves, feeling that the U.S. military was already overextended in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and another intervention risked further alienating the Muslim world.

This time, Gates found himself lined up with Biden “urging caution,” while Clinton joined with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice and NSC aides Ben Rhodes and Samantha Power in “urging aggressive U.S. action to prevent an anticipated massacre of the rebels as Qaddafi fought to remain in power,” Gates wrote. “In the final phase of the internal debate, Hillary threw her considerable clout behind Rice, Rhodes and Power.”

President Obama again ceded to Clinton’s advocacy for war and supported a Western bombing campaign that enabled the rebels, including Islamic extremists with ties to Al Qaeda, to seize control of Tripoli and hunt down Gaddafi, who was tortured and executed on Oct. 20, 2011.

Clinton expressed, delight when she received the news of Gaddafi’s murder. “We came. We saw. He died,” she chortled, paraphrasing Julius Caesar’s boast after a victory by Imperial Rome.

After Clinton’s “victory,” Libya became a major source for regional instability, including an assault on the U.S. mission in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. personnel, an incident that Clinton has called the worst moment in her four years as Secretary of State. The Islamic State also gained a foothold inside Libya, chopping off the heads of Coptic Christians.

Gates retired from the Pentagon on July 1, 2011; Petraeus resigned as CIA director on Nov. 9, 2012, amid a sex-and-secrets scandal; and Clinton stepped down at the State Department on Feb. 1, 2013, after Obama’s reelection.

In 2013, with Clinton gone, Obama charted a more innovative foreign policy course, collaborating with Russian President Vladimir Putin to achieve diplomatic breakthroughs on Syria and Iran, rather than seeking military solutions. In both cases, Obama had to face down hawkish sentiments in his own administration and in Congress, as well as Israeli and Saudi opposition.

But the neocon empire struck back in 2014, with Assistant Secretary Nuland orchestrating a “regime change” in Ukraine on Russia’s border and with the neocon-dominated opinion circles of Official Washington placing the blame for the Ukraine crisis on President Putin’s “aggression.”

Faced with this new “group think” and still influenced by liberal

interventionist advisers such as Susan Rice and Samantha Power Obama joined the chorus of hate-talk against Putin, ratcheting up tensions with Russia and agreeing to escalate covert U.S. support for Syrian rebels seeking the long-held neocon goal of “regime change” in Syria.

However, Obama continued to collaborate behind the scenes with Russia to achieve an agreement to constrain Iran’s nuclear program – to the dismay of the neocons who wanted instead to bomb-bomb-bomb Iran on their way to seeking another “regime change.”

Bashing Iran

As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton was a hawk on the Iranian nuclear issue. In 2009-2010, when Iran first indicated a willingness to compromise, she led the opposition to any negotiated settlement and pushed for punishing sanctions.

To clear the route for sanctions, Clinton helped sink agreements tentatively negotiated with Iran to ship most of its low-enriched uranium out of the country. In 2009, Iran was refining uranium only to the level of about 3-4 percent, as needed for energy production. Its negotiators offered to swap much of that for nuclear isotopes for medical research.

But the Obama administration and the West rebuffed the Iranian gesture because it would have left Iran with enough enriched uranium to theoretically refine much higher up to 90 percent for potential use in a single bomb, though Iran insisted it had no such intention and U.S. intelligence agencies agreed.

Then, in spring 2010, Iran accepted another version of the uranium swap proposed by the leaders of Brazil and Turkey, with the apparent backing of President Obama. But that arrangement came under fierce attack by Secretary Clinton and was derided by leading U.S. news outlets, including editorial writers at the New York Times who mocked Brazil and Turkey as being “played by Tehran.”

The ridicule of Brazil and Turkey as bumbling understudies on the world stage continued even after Brazil released Obama’s private letter to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva encouraging Brazil and Turkey to work out the deal. Despite the letter’s release, Obama didn’t publicly defend the swap and instead joined in scuttling the deal, another moment when Clinton and administration hardliners got their way.

That set the world on the course for tightened economic sanctions on Iran and heightened tensions that brought the region close to another war. As Israel threatened to attack, Iran expanded its nuclear capabilities by increasing enrichment to 20 percent to fill its research needs, moving closer to the level necessary for building a bomb.

Clinton's Course

Ironically, the nuclear deal reached in late 2013 and solidified in 2015 essentially accepts Iran's low-enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes, pretty much where matters stood in 2009-2010. But the Israel Lobby quickly set to work, again, trying to torpedo the new Iran agreements by getting Congress to approve new sanctions on Iran.

Clinton remained noncommittal for several weeks as momentum for the sanctions bill grew, but she finally declared her support for President Obama's opposition to the new sanctions. In a Jan. 26, 2014 [letter](#) to Sen. Carl Levin, D-Michigan, she wrote:

"Now that serious negotiations are finally under way, we should do everything we can to test whether they can advance a permanent solution. As President Obama said, we must give diplomacy a chance to succeed, while keeping all options on the table. The U.S. intelligence community has assessed that imposing new unilateral sanctions now 'would undermine the prospects for a successful comprehensive nuclear agreement with Iran.' I share that view."

One key question for a Clinton presidential candidacy has been whether she would build on the diplomatic foundation that Obama has laid regarding Iran and Russia, or dismantle it and return to a neocon foreign policy focused on "regime change" and catering to the views of Israel and Saudi Arabia.

In her campaign's latest comments, Hillary Clinton has made clear that she has little interest in deviating further from the Israeli-neocon prescribed hostility toward Iran by letting her campaign accuse Sanders of softness on Tehran.

So, with her once-solid polls numbers softening, she has decided to appeal to hawkish Democrats and the muscular support of the Israel Lobby to help her fend off the Sanders surge.

Clinton is rolling the dice in the belief that most Democrats won't think through the fallacious "group thinks" of Official Washington or will at least be scared and confused enough to steer away from Sanders. That way, Clinton believes she can still win the nomination.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

The ‘Anti-Knowledge’ of the Elites

Exclusive: It’s fairly easy to spot the “anti-knowledge” spouted by the Tea Party and the Religious Right’s favorite candidates, but a more subtle form of reality-deprived “group think” pervades America’s elites though it is rarely noted in the polite circles of the mainstream media, writes Mike Lofgren.

By Mike Lofgren

In a previous piece, I described how the Republican Party and its ideological allies in the fundamentalist churches have confected a comprehensive media-entertainment complex to attract low-information Americans and turn them into partisans.

The propaganda they are fed has become so disconnected from facts, evidence and logic that it is all too easy to laugh at people operating on demonstrably – and even ridiculously – false premises, such as the notion that Barack Obama, born in Hawaii, is not a natural-born American, or that the Sandy Hook school massacre was an elaborate fake designed to take away the firearms of patriotic Americans.

It would be comforting to believe that somewhere in the commanding heights of our permanent government, there are important players who are serious grownups who know what they are doing. That, at least, is the impression they seek to convey with their sober demeanors, credentials from think tanks or prestigious universities, and the measured, almost soporific testimony they deliver to congressional committees.

Think of Robert Gates, Ashton Carter, Timothy Geithner or Eric Holder. On the surface, they seem the very antithesis of the Tea Party fanatic, gibbering about ISIS training camps in America. The preferred pose of these establishment personages is that of the politically neutral technocrat offering well-considered advice based on their profound expertise.

That pose is nonsense. They are deeply dyed in the hue of the official ideology of the governing class, an ideology that is neither specifically Democrat nor Republican. Domestically, whatever they might privately believe about essentially diversionary social issues (“rube bait”) like abortion or gay marriage, they almost invariably believe in the “Washington Consensus”: financialization, outsourcing, privatization, deregulation and the commodification of labor.

Internationally, they espouse Twenty-first Century American Exceptionalism: the

right and duty of the United States to meddle in every region of the world, coercive diplomacy, boots on the ground, and the right to ignore painfully-won international norms of civilized behavior. To paraphrase what Sir John Harrington said over 400 years ago about treason, now that the ideology of the Deep State has prospered, none dare call it ideology.

Let us consider some of the tenets of their faith:

–Almost a decade and a half later, it is now permissible to suggest that the invasion of Iraq was less than well considered. But to actually hold the authors of the invasion politically accountable is taboo and to suggest criminal culpability is to get oneself ejected from the salons of the Consensus.

–There is ample evidence of conscious criminal malfeasance, including selling investment instruments deliberately designed to fail, in the financial saturnalia leading, in 2008, to the greatest global economic collapse in 80 years. But our highest law enforcement official said maybe we shouldn't prosecute the high-level instigators. Why? Just because.

–ISIS is seen in Washington as a grave terrorist threat with the potential to knock over the unpopular and unstable regimes of the Middle East (i.e., our client states) like bowling pins. Yet the Washington Consensus sees as the key to defeating ISIS the undermining of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, ISIS's principal military enemy. If a U.S. general in 1942 declared the only way to defeat the Wehrmacht would be for us to fight Nazi Germany and the USSR simultaneously, he would have been committed to a lunatic asylum.

–Could widening income inequality just possibly have something to do with corporations and the rich inducing their bought-and-paid-for politicians to rewrite the tax code, trade laws, labor protections and pension rules in other words, rigging the system? Oh, no, it was all inevitable, say the “sensible centrists;” that's just the way the world works. So maybe if the little people just got off their duffs, loaded up on student debt, and got educated, they'd be ready for the brave new world of the Washington Consensus.

–American International Group executives whose malfeasance or incompetence led to the company being bailed out (and nationalized in all but the name) by the American taxpayer are entitled to keep their stratospheric salaries and bonuses because of a holy principle called “sanctity of contract.” Do autoworkers, or pensioners of the City of Detroit, get to keep their previously agreed-to compensation? No, because that's how a globalized economic system works.

These examples reveal a display of infantile logic or pernicious mendacity every bit as flagrant as Ben Carson's mumblings or Donald Trump's berserker rants.

Yet, rather than selling snake-oil miracle health cures, as Carson and Mike Huckabee have done, the people who inflict this nonsense on us typically wind up teaching at the Kennedy School of Government, or serving as the president of a university or as a board member of a Fortune 500 company.

The imbecility of Tea Party dervishes is easy enough to detect, so why does the equally twisted reasoning of the bipartisan Wise Men (and women) escape public detection? Perhaps the reason is that democracy, or at least the oligarchically managed democracy that exists, is, in the words of H.L. Mencken, “based upon so childish a complex of fallacies that they must be protected by a rigid system of taboos, else even half-wits would argue it to pieces.”

The principal enforcer of those taboos is the prestige media. Their main method is to define “objectivity” to mean “a refusal to judge.” But when the truth is accessible and corroborable, it would be silly to stage a debate in which proponents of a spherical earth and champions of a flat earth receive equal time, with the debate’s moderator expressing doubt as to the verdict until one side or the other triumphs with clever rhetoric. Yet that is the prestige press’ default position.

It is occasionally refreshing when outlandish characters like Trump refuse to play by the rules. For 14 years, whether and to what extent George W. Bush’s potential nonfeasance (or actual negligence) facilitated the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, has generally been an off-limits subject for the mainstream media.

Only when Trump broached the subject was the press free to jump on it. And the interviewer, Bloomberg’s Stephanie Ruhle, immediately interrupted Trump by blurting out, “Hold on, you can’t blame George Bush for that!” One wonders whether she was doubtful of the truth of his statement or worried about the potential blowback against her career.

As Josh Marshall, editor of Talking Points Memo, pointed out, the American media naively (or timidly) treated House Republicans’ interminable hearings on the assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, as if it were a serious and judicious attempt to determine the facts in the case. It was only when Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-California, the House majority leader, committed a Freudian slip by saying that the hearings were designed to derail Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign, that the press was “allowed” to judge the intent of the House Republicans’ investigation.

And sure enough the media have responded, with even *Newsweek*, normally a purveyor of conventional wisdom, publishing a sharp critique of the kangaroo-court aspect of the investigation. That said, one tack the media will *not* take

on Benghazi is to look at the bigger picture: that the intervention in Libya was a massive, bipartisan failure of the Washington Consensus, with the Obama administration executing it and the House and Senate Republican leadership egging it on.

Normally free from criticism, much less accountability, the careerists of Washington enjoy a lucrative racket. Take General Keith Alexander, the former director of the National Security Agency. On his watch the most massive leak of government secrets in history occurred, and several members of Congress also claimed he misled them about the scope and legality of his agency's collection of Americans' private information.

Yet he managed to parlay those failures into a big payday. In 2014, Alexander set himself up as the head of a consulting boutique called IronNet Cybersecurity. His principal client is one of Wall Street's largest lobbying groups, the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA), from which he receives \$600,000 per month.

The money is often beyond the dreams of avarice, but that is not the only factor in play. All the big players have been sheep-dipped in a world view that becomes a reflex.

The anthropologist E. T. Hall, in "Beyond Culture," put it this way: Everything man is and does is modified by learning and is therefore malleable. But once learned, these behavior patterns, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and, like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths. The hidden controls are usually experienced as though they were innate simply because they are not only ubiquitous but habitual as well."

The twin seductions of money and Washington "group think" have led our Wise Men into one disaster after another in both domestic and foreign policy. In view of their lamentable record over the last decade and a half, their advice and counsel is probably no better than that of a snake-handling shaman in the remotest hollow of West Virginia, and certainly a good deal more expensive.

Mike Lofgren is a former congressional staff member who served on both the House and Senate budget committees. His book about Congress, The Party is Over: How Republicans Went Crazy, Democrats Became Useless, and the Middle Class Got Shafted, appeared in paperback in August 2013. His new book, The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government, will be published in January 2016.

A Close Call on Doomsday

The risk of nuclear extermination is real, especially at times of revved-up tensions between the U.S. and Russia, when a political miscalculation or a technical mistake could prove disastrous, a danger that pushed the two sides to the brink of war in 1983, as ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman recalls.

By Melvin A. Goodman

The *Washington Post* on Oct. 25 published an important story based on a recently-published U.S. intelligence review from 1990 that confirmed Soviet leaders in 1983 believed the Reagan administration was using a mobilization exercise to prepare a nuclear surprise attack. In response, the KGB instituted a sensitive collection effort, Operation RYAN, to determine if the United States was indeed planning such an attack.

I was a CIA analyst at the time, and the incident was known to me and several colleagues as the “war scare” in the Kremlin. There are lessons from the “war scare” that can be applied to the unnecessary escalation of tension between Washington and Moscow now taking place.

The year 1983 was the most dangerous year in the Soviet-American Cold War confrontation since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. President Ronald Reagan declared a political and military campaign against the “evil empire,” although Soviet leaders were looking to break the Gordian knot that was hurting the Kremlin. The intelligence indicated that the Soviet Union was in a downward spiral marked by the quagmire in Afghanistan; the drain of funds in the Third World, particularly in Cuba; the political and military setbacks in Angola and Nicaragua; and the increased cost of competing with the largest peacetime increases in the U.S. defense budget since the end of World War II.

Soviet leaders believed that the “correlation of world forces,” Soviet terminology for weighing the international balance, was working against the interests of Moscow and that the U.S. government was in the hands of a dangerous anti-Soviet crowd.

In response to Reagan’s references to the Soviet Union as the “focus of evil in the world” and as an “evil empire,” the new Soviet general secretary, Yuri Andropov, the former KGB chief, suggested that Reagan was insane and a liar. U.S. media paid close attention to Reagan’s sensational charges, and Soviet media launched a verbal offensive that matched Reagan’s rhetoric. Reagan was compared to Hitler and accused of “fanning the flames of war.” Andropov was portrayed in the U.S. press as a Red Darth Vader. Reagan’s demonization of

Soviet leaders was counter-productive just as Barack Obama's demonization of Vladimir Putin has been counter-productive.

In addition to the Able Archer mobilization exercise that alarmed the Kremlin, the Reagan administration authorized unusually aggressive military exercises near the Soviet border that, in some cases, violated Soviet territorial sovereignty. The Pentagon's risky measures included sending U.S. strategic bombers over the North Pole to test Soviet radar, and naval exercises in wartime approaches to the USSR where U.S. warships had previously not entered. Additional secret operations simulated surprise naval attacks on Soviet targets.

One of the great similarities between Russia and the United States was that both sides feared surprise attack. The United States suffered psychologically from the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor; it has still not recovered from 9/11. Yet, the United States has never appreciated that Moscow has similar fears due to Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion in the same year as Pearl Harbor, a far greater nightmare.

Russia's fear of surprise attack was accentuated in 1983, when the United States deployed the Army's Pershing-II missile and land-based cruise missiles in West Europe as a counter to the Soviet Union's SS-20 missiles.

The SS-20 was not a "strategic" weapon because of a limited range (3,000 miles) well short of the United States. The P-II, however, could not only reach the Soviet Union, but it could destroy Moscow's command and control systems with incredible accuracy. Since the Soviets would have limited warning time less than five minutes the P-II was viewed as a first-strike weapon that could destroy the Soviet early warning system.

In addition to the huge strategic advantage from the deployment of P-II and numerous cruise missiles, the U.S. deployment of the MX missile and the D-5 Trident submarine placed the Soviets in an inferior position with regard to strategic modernization. Overall, the United States held a huge strategic advantage in political, economic, and military policy.

The Pentagon's psychological warfare program to intimidate the Kremlin, including dangerous probes of Soviet borders by the Navy and Air Force, was unknown to CIA analysts. Thus, the CIA was at a disadvantage in trying to analyze the war scare because the Pentagon refused to share information on military maneuvers and weapons deployments.

In 1983, the CIA had no idea that the annual Able Archer exercise would be conducted in a provocative fashion with high-level participation. The exercise

was a test of U.S. command-and-communications procedures, including procedures for the release and use of nuclear weapons in case of war.

Nevertheless, CIA deputy director for intelligence Robert Gates and National Intelligence Officer for Soviet strategic weapons Larry Gershwin turned out several national intelligence estimates that dismissed "Soviet fear of conflict with the United States." They believed that any notion of a Soviet fear of an American attack was risible, and it wasn't until 1990 that the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board concluded that there had been a "serious concern" in the Kremlin over a possible U.S. attack. Gershwin, who politicized intelligence on strategic matters throughout the 1980s, is still at the CIA as a national intelligence officer.

I believed that Soviet fears were genuine at the time, and Reagan's national security advisor Robert McFarlane was even known to remark, "We got their attention" but "maybe we overdid it."

For the only time during William Casey's stewardship as CIA director, he believed his intelligence analysts who argued the "war scare" was genuine, and ignored the views of Gates and Gershwin. Casey took our analysis to the White House, and Reagan made sure that the exercises were toned down.

For the first time, the Able Archer exercise was going to include President Reagan, Vice President George H.W. Bush, and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, but when the White House understood the extent of Soviet anxiety regarding U.S. intentions, the major principals bowed out.

In his memoirs, Reagan recorded his surprise that Soviet leaders were afraid of an American first strike. One of the reasons why Secretary of State George Shultz was able to convince Reagan of the need for summitry with later Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was Reagan's belief that it was necessary to convince Moscow that the United States had no plans for an attack.

Ironically, Soviet military doctrine had long held that a possible U.S. *modus operandi* for launching an attack would be to convert an exercise into the real thing.

Nevertheless, one year after President Reagan conceded that the "war scare" was genuine, he issued a radio warning into an open mike: "I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." Those of us who worked on the war scare were stunned.

Three decades later, history seems to be repeating itself. Washington and Moscow are once again exchanging ugly broadsides over the confrontations in Ukraine and Syria. The Russian-American arms control and disarmament dialogue has been

pushed to the background, and the possibilities of superpower conflict into the foreground.

Pentagon briefers are using the language of the Cold War in their congressional briefings, referring to Putin's regime as an "existential threat." Presidential candidates in the United States are using confrontational language, and promising to go on the offensive to knock Putin on his heels. President Obama seems to recognize the false security of military power, but he needs to act on his suppositions.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA*, *National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism*, and the forthcoming *The Path to Dissent: A Whistleblower at CIA* (City Lights Publishers, 2015). Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org, where this article first appeared. [Republished with permission of the author.]

Resurgence of the 'Surge' Myth

Exclusive: Official Washington loves the story the Iraq War was failing until President George W. Bush bravely ordered a "surge" in 2007 that won the war, but President Obama squandered the victory, requiring a new "surge" now. Except the narrative is dangerous make-believe, says ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

As American politicians and editorial writers resume their tough talk about sending more U.S. troops into Iraq, they are resurrecting the "successful surge" myth, the claim that President George W. Bush's dispatch of 30,000 more soldiers in 2007 somehow "won" the war a storyline that is beloved by the neocons because it somewhat lets them off the hook for starting the disaster in the first place.

But just because Official Washington embraces a narrative doesn't make it true. Bush's "surge" was, in reality, a dismal – an unconscionable – failure. It did not achieve its ostensible aim – the rationale Bush eventually decided to give it – namely, to buy time for Iraq's Sunnis and Shiites to reconcile.

Rather, it did just the opposite, greatly exacerbating antagonisms between them. That result was clearly predicted before the "surge" by none other than Defense

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, top U.S. military leaders, and even the Washington Establishment-heavy Iraq Study Group, all of which were pressing for less – not more – military involvement.

In one very important sense, however, the “surge” into Iraq was wildly successful in achieving what was almost certainly its primary aim. It bought President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney a “decent interval” so they could leave office without an explicit military defeat sullyng their legacy and for the “acceptable” price of “only” 1,000 more U.S. dead.

At the time there were other options and indeed many of the “achievements” credited to the “surge” had already happened or at least had begun. The hyper-violent Al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in June 2006; ethnic cleansing was separating Sunni and Shiite communities; and the Sunni Awakening the buying off of some tribal leaders was being implemented.

Yet, by fall 2006 it also was 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” by Michael R. Gordon 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. After months of policy review during 2006 with former CIA Director Robert Gates as a member it 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." Though a member of the Iraq Study Group, Gates quietly disassociated himself from its findings when Bush was dangling the position of Defense Secretary in front of the always ambitious Gates. After Nov. 8, 2006 when Bush announced Gates's nomination, Gates quit the ISG.

Gates would do what he needed to do to become secretary of defense. At his confirmation hearing on Dec. 5, he obscured his opinions by telling the Senate Armed Services only "all options are on the table in terms of Iraq." The Democrats, including then-Sen. Hillary Clinton, swooned over Gates's supposed thoughtfulness and wisdom.

Many Democrats assumed that Gates would help persuade Bush to implement the ISG's plan for a troop drawdown, but they were in for a surprise. With unanimous Democratic support and only two conservative Republicans opposed, Gates was confirmed by the full Senate on Dec. 6, the same day the ISG report was formally released. But the Democrats and much of the mainstream media had completely misread the behind-the-scenes story.

Gates to the Rescue

The little-understood reality behind Bush's decision to catapult Robert Gates into his Pentagon perch was the astonishing fact that previous Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, of all people, was pulling a Robert McNamara; 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 came 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 U.S. president to “lose a war.”

Waiting in the wings, though, was Robert Gates, who had been dispatched into a political purgatory after coming under suspicion of lying during the Iran-Contra scandal as Ronald Reagan’s deputy CIA director. Though President George H. W. Bush pushed through Gates’s nomination to be CIA director in 1991, Gates was sent packing by President Bill Clinton in 1993.

The elder Bush bailed Gates out again by getting him appointed as president of Texas A&M in College Station, Texas, the site of Bush’s presidential library. But Gates began his Washington rehabilitation with a spot on 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. Rumsfeld had outlived his usefulness.

And, because of Official Washington’s famous forgetfulness, Gates was remembered not as a conniving and deceptive CIA bureaucrat, but as a “wise man” who was seen as a restraining emissary sent by the senior George Bush to rein in his impetuous son.

Rumsfeld’s ‘Known Knowns’

Easing the going-wobbly Rumsfeld off the stage was awkward. Right up to the week before the mid-term elections on Nov. 7, 2006, President Bush insisted that he intended to keep Rumsfeld in place for the next two years. Suddenly, however, the President had to confront Rumsfeld’s apostasy favoring a drawdown of U.S. troops from 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 Gen. David Petraeus, who had jumped on board for the “surge” escalation following the advice of his favorite neocon theorists, including Frederick Kagan.

With the bemedaled Petraeus in the wings and pro-surge guidance from Kagan and retired Gen. Jack Keane, all the White House needed was a new Pentagon chief who could be counted on to take Rumsfeld’s place and do the White House’s bidding. (If the names Kagan and Keane sound somewhat familiar, would you

believe that they are now playing on President Barack Obama's Bush-like aversion to losing a war on his watch, and are loudly and unashamedly promoting the idea of yet another "surge" into Iraq?)

On Nov. 5, 2006, Bush had a one-on-one with Gates in Crawford, Texas, and the deal was struck. Forget the torturously hammered-out recommendations of the Iraq Study Group; forget what the military commanders and even Rumsfeld were saying. Gates suddenly found the "surge" an outstanding idea. Well, not really. That's just what he let Bush believe. (While "chameleon" is the word most often used for Gates by those who knew him at the CIA, Melvin Goodman, who worked with Gates in the branch I led on Soviet Foreign Policy uses the best label – "windsock.")

Gates is second to none, not even Petraeus, in ambition and self-promotion. It is a safe bet he wanted desperately to be Secretary of Defense, to be back at center stage in Washington after nearly 14 years in exile from the big show.

He quickly agreed to tell Gen. Abizaid to retire; offer Gen. Casey a sinecure as Army chief of staff, providing he kept his mouth shut; and to eagle-scout his way through Senate confirmation with the help of pundits like David Ignatius composing panegyrics in honor of Gates, the "realist."

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 aura of a pajama party (I was there). Gates told the senators bedtime stories and vowed to show "great deference to the judgment of generals."

That "deference" included Gates dumping Abizaid and Casey. But the administration faltered embarrassingly in coming up with a reasonable rationale to "justify" the surge, especially in the face of so much on-the-ground advice opposing the troop increase. And, the truth wouldn't work either. You couldn't really say: "We're trading the lives of U.S. troops for a politically useful 'decent interval.'"

On Dec. 20, 2006, President Bush told the Washington Post that he was "inclined to believe we do need to increase our troops, the Army and Marines." He added, tellingly, "There's got to be a specific mission that can be accomplished with the addition of more troops," adding that he would look to Gates, just back from a quick trip to Baghdad, to help explain.

Searching for a Rationale

By way of preliminary explanation for the "surge," President Bush wandered back and forth between "ideological struggle" to "sectarian violence." He told the Post, "I'm going to keep repeating this over and over again, that I believe

we're in an ideological struggle" and, besides, "sectarian violence [is] obviously the real problem we face."

When it became clear that those dogs wouldn't hunt, the White House justified the "surge" as necessary to give Iraqi government leaders "breathing space" to work out their differences. That was the rationale offered by Bush in a major address on Jan 10, 2007. Pulling out all the stops, he also raised the specter of another 9/11 and, of course, spoke of the "decisive ideological struggle of our time."

Taking a slap at his previous generals, the ISG and the wobbly Rumsfeld, Bush dismissed those who "are concerned that the Iraqis are becoming too dependent on the United States" and those whose "solution is to scale back America's efforts in Baghdad, or announce a phased withdrawal of our combat forces."

The President did warn that the year ahead would be "bloody and violent, even if our strategy works." He got that part right. One would be tempted to laugh at Bush's self-absorption – and Gates's ambition – were we not talking about the completely unnecessary killing of over 1,000 U.S. troops and the brutalization of other U.S. soldiers – not to mention the slaughter of thousands of Iraqis.

In reality, by throwing 30,000 additional troops into Iraq, Bush and Cheney got two years of breathing room as they wound down their administration and some political space to snipe at their successors who inherited the Iraq mess.

But what about the thousand-plus U.S. troops killed during the "surge"? The tens of thousand of Iraqis? The hundreds of thousands displaced from their homes in the Baghdad area alone? I fear the attitude was this: Nobody would get killed, just a bunch of Iraqis and GIs mostly from small-town and inner-city America. And, anyway, our soldiers and Marines all volunteered, didn't they?

Bush, Cheney and Gates apparently deemed it a small price to pay for enabling them to blame a successor administration for the inevitable withdrawal from America's first large-scale war of aggression. I have known Gates for 45 years; he has always been transparently ambitious, but he is also bright. He knew better; and he did it anyway.

While those tactical machinations and political calculations were underway, Col. W. Patrick Lang, USA (retired), and I wrote a piece on Dec. 20, 2006, in which we exposed the chicanery and branded such a "surge" strategy "nothing short of immoral, in view of the predictable troop losses and the huge number of Iraqis who would meet violent injury and death."

Surprisingly, we were joined by Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Oregon, who explained to ABC's George Stephanopoulos why Smith said on the Senate floor that U.S. policy

on Iraq may be “criminal.” “You can use any adjective you want, George. But I have long believed that in a military context, when you do the same thing over and over again without a clear strategy for victory, at the expense of your young people in arms, that is dereliction. That is deeply immoral.”

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. In the 1960s he served as an Army infantry/intelligence officer and later as a CIA analyst. Full disclosure: In the 1970s, he was chief of CIA’s Soviet Foreign Policy Branch, in which Gates worked as a junior analyst. On his annual Fitness Report, Gates was formally counseled regarding the disruptive effects of his unbridled ambition – as were managers up the line. Later, when Reagan’s CIA Director William Casey picked Gates to head CIA’s analysis directorate, there was considerable regret that no one listened.

CIA at 50, Lost in the ‘Politicization’ Swamp

From the Archive: Almost 20 years ago even before the Iraq WMD fiasco as the CIA was celebrating its half-century anniversary, the impact of a Reagan-era “reorganization” was being felt in the “politicization” of intelligence, Robert Parry wrote in 1997. Now, a new reorganization could make matters worse.

By Robert Parry (Originally published in 1997)

Through its first three decades, the CIA prided itself on maintaining an intellectual integrity in its analysis of world events. CIA analysts often delivered to the White House data that conflicted with what presidents wanted to hear. President Eisenhower was challenged on the bomber gap and President Kennedy on the missile gap. Presidents Johnson and Nixon didn’t like many of the discouraging words on the Vietnam War.

The CIA’s “operations” branch may have stumbled into bloody controversies from time to time. But the CIA’s “analytical” division maintained a relatively good – though by no means perfect – reputation for supplying straightforward intelligence to policymakers.

Like so much else at the CIA, however, that tradition changed in the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan’s determination to enforce his “Evil Empire” vision of the Soviet Union. The writing was quickly on the wall. The Reagan transition

team denounced CIA career analysts for allegedly underestimating the Soviet commitment to world domination.

“These failures are of such enormity,” the report claimed, “that they cannot help but suggest to any objective observer that the agency itself is compromised to an unprecedented extent and that its paralysis is attributable to causes more sinister than incompetence.” [See Mark Perry’s *Eclipse*.]

To make Reagan’s apocalyptic vision stick – to blame Moscow for the world’s terrorism, Yellow Rain chemical warfare in Indochina, the Pope assassination attempt and virtually all revolutionary movements in the Third World – Reagan and his CIA Director William J. Casey set out to purge the CIA analytical division of those who wouldn’t toe the party line, those who saw the Soviet Union as a declining empire still interested in detente with the West.

The CIA purge helped Reagan and Casey in another way, too. It cut off the potential for reliable CIA information reaching Congress and the public about scandals in the U.S. overt-covert paramilitary operations in Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Casey’s domestic “perception management” campaigns which sought to influence the U.S. public debate on these issues also would be strengthened by ensuring only favorable CIA-blessed propaganda. [For details, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History*.]

So out of view, in the closed community of the CIA, Casey elevated Robert Gates, one of the hardest of anti-Soviet hard-liners, to head the Directorate of Intelligence [DI], the analytical side.

In summer 1997 issue of *Foreign Policy*, former CIA senior analyst Melvin A. Goodman described the effect: “The CIA’s objectivity on the Soviet Union ended abruptly in 1981, when Casey became the DCI – and the first one to be a member of the president’s Cabinet. Gates became Casey’s deputy director for intelligence (DDI) in 1982 and chaired the National Intelligence Council.”

Gates restructured the DI from a subject-matter framework to a geographical one. That allowed Gates to jump his allies, who became known as “Gates clones,” into key positions. Some of those who rose were David Cohen, David Carey, George Kolt, John McLaughlin, Jim Lynch, Winston Wiley and John Gannon.

With the Gates regime in place, career analysts in sensitive positions soon found themselves the victims of bare-knuckle bureaucratic pummelings. Some were verbally berated into changing their analyses; some faced job threats and allegations of psychiatric unfitness; others experienced confrontations with supervisors who literally threw papers in the analysts’ faces.

Hyping the ‘Evil Empire’

Early on, the Reagan administration pressed the CIA to adopt an analysis that accepted right-wing media reports pinning European terrorism on the Soviets. The CIA analysts knew that these charges were false, in part because they were based on “black” or false propaganda that the CIA itself had been planting in the European media.

But the “politicization” tide was strong. In 1985, Gates closeted a special team to push through another pre-cooked paper arguing that the KGB was behind the 1981 wounding of Pope John Paul II. CIA analysts again knew that the charge was bogus, but could not block the paper from leaving CIA.

On another ideologically sensitive front, analysts faced pressure to back off an assessment that Pakistan was violating nuclear proliferation safeguards. That was sensitive because Pakistan’s military government was aiding the Afghan mujahedeen rebels fighting Soviet troops.

Reagan also wanted analyses that exaggerated Soviet strength and Moscow’s expansionist tendencies. Again, the analysts found the evidence lacking, but the administration prevailed in hyping threat analyses. Analysts grew so fearful of reporting on Soviet weaknesses that the CIA fell way behind the curve in recognizing the coming Soviet collapse.

On many levels, the Casey-Gates assault on the CIA analysts was a dramatic behind-the-scenes story that contributed to historic developments in the 1980s: the brutal anti-communist tactics in Central America, tolerance of human rights abusers and drug traffickers among U.S. allies, false CIA reports about “moderates” in Iran that justified the Iran-Contra arms sales, and scary assessments of Soviet might which bloated U.S. defense budgets.

But this intimidation of the CIA analysts and its consequences are still little understood in Washington. The story surfaced briefly in 1991 during Robert Gates’s confirmation hearings when a handful of analysts braved the Bush administration by protesting the “politicization of intelligence.” Led by Goodman, these dissidents fingered Gates as a key player in the campaign.

The “politicization” testimony added more doubts about Gates, who already was under fire for his dubious testimony on the Iran-Contra scandal. But President Bush lined up solid Republican backing and enough accommodating Democrats, particularly Sen. David Boren, the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, to shove Gates through as CIA director.

Clinton’s Opening

There was, however, a brief window for change with Bill Clinton’s election in 1992 – and the issue was put before Clinton’s incoming national security team.

Former CIA analyst Peter W. Dickson explained the problem bluntly in a two-page memo to Samuel "Sandy" Berger, who later became Clinton's national security adviser.

Dickson, an analyst who suffered retaliation for refusing to rewrite a 1983 assessment that noted Soviet restraint on nuclear proliferation, urged Clinton to appoint a CIA director who understood "the deeper internal problems relating to the politicization of intelligence and the festering morale problem within the CIA." In this Dec. 10, 1992, memo, Dickson saw a housecleaning at the top as crucial:

"This problem of intellectual corruption will not disappear overnight, even with vigorous remedial action. However, the new CIA director will be wise if he realizes from the start the dangers in relying on the advice of senior CIA office managers who during the past 12 years advanced and prospered in their careers precisely because they had no qualms about suppressing intelligence or slanting analysis to suit the interest of Casey and Gates. This is a deep systemic problem. ...

"The lack of accountability also became a systemic problem in the 1980s under Casey and Gates. ... A recent CIA inspector general investigation confirms the near total breakdown in confidence among employee[s] that management is willing to deal honestly and objectively with their complaints. Many of them concern the lack of professional ethics and in some cases personal abuse at the hands of senior officer managers – a group of individuals beholden and therefore loyal to Gates."

Dickson, a creative thinker who also investigates historical mysteries such as the real backgrounds of Columbus and Shakespeare, recommended that Clinton focus on "intellectual integrity and accountability" in selecting a new CIA director. But Clinton instead was focusing "like a laser beam" on domestic policy, as he promised during the campaign. He seemed to have little interest in CIA reform.

Clinton did oust Gates but avoided confronting the problem head-on by installing James Woolsey, a neoconservative Democrat who had worked closely with the Reagan-Bush administrations. Under Woolsey, the Gates crowd, sans Gates, further consolidated its bureaucratic power. That trend continued during the brief tenure of Clinton's second CIA director, John Deutch.

The 'Gates Clones'

Clinton's next CIA director, George Tenet, also has chosen to surround himself with many of Gates's former allies. Tenet did oust Cohen, whom the analysts considered one of Gates's most aggressive enforcers. But other Gates-connected

officials – McLaughlin, Carey, Wiley and Gannon – remained in high positions inside the CIA.

Over those 15 years, the Casey-Gates allies also trained a younger generation of analysts who moved into mid-level positions. Seeing the Casey-Gates crowd still dominating the senior levels of the CIA has discouraged many of the analysts who went public to protest the “politicization.”

In interviews, these former CIA analysts complained that Clinton allowed the CIA’s drift from the Reagan-Bush years to carry the analytical division even deeper into a backwater of shoddy scholarship and low morale.

“Clinton missed an opportunity to get the CIA on the right track,” said Goodman. “The CIA’s in a hell of a lot of trouble.”

“He blew it,” declared Dickson. “He threw it away. It’s too late now.”

Dickson predicted that the CIA, just passing its 50th anniversary, would continue on a path of gradual decline and growing irrelevance. [Dickson’s prediction proved prescient given the cascade of later failures under CIA Director Tenet.]

“I don’t see any improvement,” added John A. Gentry, an analyst who resigned in 1991 with a letter that read: “I can no longer work in an organization in which satisfaction of bureaucratic superiors is more important than superior analysis.”

Gentry, a former Army Special Forces officer and economist, compiled his criticisms in a 1993 book, *Lost Promise: How CIA Analysis Misserves the Nation*. One recommendation stated that “the destructiveness of some managers’ meanness, dishonesty and lack of intellectual integrity is so great that significant numbers – including many senior officers – should be fired from the Agency.”

But Gentry concluded that Clinton would not reverse the damage. “You’re 15 years into decay,” Gentry said. Clinton’s CIA appointees have “fussed around at the margins, but they haven’t made the cultural, leadership and even moral changes that are needed.”

Ducking a Fight

Clinton seemed to have thought that as long as he pumped money into the intelligence budget – about \$30 billion a year – and took no stern actions against the Langley power structure, the CIA would make no trouble for him.

His attitude apparently was colored by the perception that President Carter’s shake-up of the CIA in the late 1970s drove a small clandestine army of furious

spooks into the Bush and Reagan campaigns of 1980. With Clinton's sensitivity over his Vietnam draft avoidance, he also saw a messy clash over restructuring the CIA as a distraction from his domestic agenda.

"I see no indication anywhere that Clinton has taken any interest in anything that has occurred," said Gentry. "Clinton is quite content to have a weak intelligence community."

Still, Clinton found that his hands-off strategy did not save him from getting burned in fall 1993 when he was seeking to restore Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. The CIA analytical division, built by Casey and Gates, sent a report to Congress which claimed, apparently falsely, that Aristide had undergone psychiatric care in Canada. The report was seized upon by conservatives in Congress who considered Aristide a dangerous leftist.

Woolsey's tenure was marred, too, by the discovery that CIA counter-intelligence officer Aldrich Ames sold secrets to Moscow for almost a decade. Congress turned on Woolsey for supposedly not acting decisively enough to discipline senior officers who had supervised Ames.

Deutch, a brilliant but prickly scientist from MIT, succeeded Woolsey but made few significant changes at the CIA, either. Then after a failed attempt by Clinton to place his national security adviser Anthony Lake in the CIA's top spot, the President settled on Tenet, who had served as Deutch's deputy and before that as Boren's top aide on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Ironically, Tenet oversaw Boren's half-hearted confirmation review of Gates in 1991. From the start, that investigation was limited by Boren's commitment to Gates's confirmation. Boren accepted Gate's excuses about his less-than-candid Iran-Contra testimony.

The chairman also failed to pursue allegations linking Gates to secret U.S.-arranged arms sales to Iraq in the 1980s and to the so-called "October Surprise" case in which Reagan's campaign was alleged to have undermined President Carter's attempts to free 52 U.S. hostages held in Iran in 1980.

The failure to vet Gates came back to haunt Tenet as the policies and personnel pushed by Gates continued to dominate the CIA's analytical division, as CIA morale sagged further and its reputation as an intelligence agency deteriorated more.

Because the Boren-Tenet inquiry gave Gates a pass on the "politicization" charges, along with almost everything else, the intellectual corruption of the Casey-Gates era at CIA still was not widely understood. With no recognition of the rot, Tenet has no mandate to take the radical steps needed to solve the

problem.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
