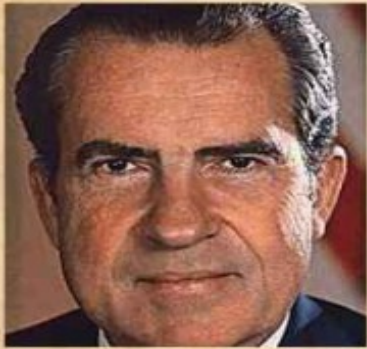


AMERICA'S STOLEN NARRATIVE



From Washington
and Madison



to Nixon, Reagan
and the Bushes



to Barack Obama



Robert Parry

America's Stolen Narrative

**From Washington and Madison to Nixon,
Reagan and the Bushes to Obama**

Robert Parry

The Media Consortium
Arlington, Virginia

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To Josie, Drew, Abby and Eva

“Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.”

Party slogan in George Orwell's *1984*

Introduction

There was always something surreal about George W. Bush's presidency, like a science-fiction disaster movie in which an alien force seizes illegitimate control of a nation, saps its wealth, wreaks devastation on its people, but is finally dislodged and forced to depart amid human hope for a rebirth. In Bush's case, there was even a satisfying concluding scene as a new human leader takes power amid cheers of a liberated populace. The alien flees aboard a form of air transportation (in this case, a helicopter), departing to the jeers of thousands and many wishes of good riddance.

But then the depleted country must turn to rebuilding and recovery. Many of the humans find their jobs are gone, or their stock portfolios, or their homes. They grow disillusioned and impatient. It turns out that many of the alien's allies remain in positions of power, a stay-behind force, especially within the nation's propaganda structure as well as at high levels of the government, courts and business. These operatives quickly get to work erasing memories of how the catastrophe occurred. They write a new narrative that shifts the blame to the new leader.

Facts are selectively presented to convince millions of the people that they should welcome another alien to rule them. Indeed, much of the population begins to accept a story line that places the alien conquest within the context of the nation's origins. It's all what the Founders intended. What the aliens understand – since they have studied this population for many years – is that they can direct the people by shaping the historical narrative. If the narrative can be shifted or falsified, the course of the nation can be redirected. By tinkering with the past or blacking out some key facts, the aliens can make their behavior appear normal, even admirable.

In this sci-fi metaphor, the only way for the humans to escape slavery is to rediscover and reclaim their truthful narrative, to identify and eliminate the false story lines that the aliens have inserted into the history. A truthful narrative is their only route to freedom.

On a bitterly cold day – January 20, 2009 – my youngest son, Jeff, then 20 years old, and I joined the masses of humanity that struggled against an overwhelmed mass transit system to get anywhere close to the U.S. Capitol where Barack Obama was to be sworn in as the 44 President of the United States, the first African-American to hold that office.

We parked my green Chevy Prism in Pentagon City, an area of shops and restaurants near the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and pushed our way into the Metro station and onto a train that took us across the Potomac River to Washington. There, we found ourselves exiting the train into even a larger throng of people. We inched and elbowed our way to an escalator and ascended to the bright frigid weather that had settled over the U.S. capital.

Bending against the bitter cold, we maneuvered toward the Mall, confronting barriers that required special credentials to pass through. Not having those credentials, we kept bending left away from the Capitol building and its famous white dome. Finally, we found a spot on the Mall almost to 14 Street. We picked out a small opening and stood shivering among the other 1.8 million people who filled the blocks upon blocks west from the Capitol, which looked rather tiny from our perspective about a mile away. Our view of the Inauguration came mostly via the Jumbotrons that were spaced along the edges of the Mall.

Despite the freezing temperatures and the transportation woes – not to mention the devastated economy and the two unfinished wars that George W. Bush was leaving behind – the crowd was remarkably friendly and upbeat. Inauguration Day 2009 was filled with a joy that I have rarely seen on the streets of Washington, a city that even at its best is not known for spontaneous bursts of happiness.

But there was more than joy that day; there was a sense of liberation. People were not only witnessing Obama's swearing-in, but Bush's ushering-out. They not only cheered Obama and their other favorites, but many booed those considered responsible for the national plundering, especially Bush and his wheelchair-bound Vice President Dick Cheney.

When Bush arrived or when Cheney was wheeled into view, people shouted in anger or heckled. Bush was serenaded with the mocking lyrics, "Na-na-nah-na, na-na-nah-na, hey, hey, hey, goodbye." One group near us started singing, "Hit the road, Jack."

Some Georgetown students next to Jeff tut-tutted the failure of the crowd to show more deference to the departing President and Vice President, but most people either laughed or joined in. To them, it seemed that taunting Bush and Cheney was the least that could be done, since the pair had been spared impeachment and any other accountability for the harm they had caused.

Eight years after Bush and Cheney were handed control of the Executive Branch thanks to five Republican partisans on the U.S. Supreme Court who had stopped the counting of votes in Florida,[\[*\]](#) a fuller measure of the consequences from the Bush-Cheney administration was now apparent. Bush and Cheney were leaving behind a ballooning federal debt, an economy in freefall, unemployment skyrocketing (along with bankruptcies and foreclosures), environmental degradation, two open-ended wars that left hundreds of thousands dead, and the nation's image around the world soiled by torture and other official crimes.

For those who followed the machinations of politics closely, it was also clear how narrowly the democratic institutions of the American Republic had dodged a possibly fatal bullet fired by Bush's operatives who saw him as a leader to transform the U.S. political system into a kind of one-party state.

Karl Rove and other Bush political aides boasted about a "permanent Republican majority,"[\[1\]](#) one that would be backed by an aggressive right-wing media. In furtherance of that goal, Rove worked to politicize the Justice Department, install ideological judges on the federal bench, and team up with media attack specialists to bully the few dissenters who got in the way.

By hyping allegations of voter fraud, the Bush team also hoped to suppress the votes of minorities and other Democratic-leaning constituencies via ballot security measures. By going after unions, the Republicans reduced the money that Democrats would need to compete in political advertising. By loosening the restrictions on donations by the super-wealthy – in part by packing the federal courts with Republican judges who opposed campaign-finance restrictions – the GOP could further stack the deck.

For those Americans who still hoped for a meaningful system of checks and balances, they were often dependent on the mainstream U.S. news media, but it had demonstrated a breathtaking degree of professional

cowardice, especially after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and before the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Under Rove's vision of a restructured Republic with a controlling Republican Party, the mainstream media could be bypassed anyway with a multi-layered right-wing media messaging machine that would influence the public through TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, books and well-funded Internet sites. Rove's scheme would keep Democrats around for show, a cosmetic appendage necessary to sustain the fiction of a democracy, but the Democrats really wouldn't have much chance to compete.

When Bush was at his peak of power in the early- to mid-2000s, it seemed like only the bravest Americans – whether in politics, journalism or other walks of life – would challenge this Republican juggernaut. Even entertainers who uttered critical words about Bush – like the Dixie Chicks – faced career reprisals and, in some cases, death threats. Post 9/11, there emerged a feeling of incipient totalitarianism as the Bush administration wiretapped communications and explored ways to “data-mine” the electronic records of virtually anyone who operated in the modern economy – what the Pentagon's research arm, DARPA, called “Total Information Awareness.” The end of the old Republic was within sight.

It was only because of the courage of a small minority of Americans that this wave of Republican extremism met any resistance at all. Ultimately, however, it was Bush's own mistakes – the disastrous turns in the Iraq War beginning in late 2003, his botched response to the Katrina hurricane disaster in 2005 and the catastrophic Wall Street collapse in 2008, partly due to Bush's deregulatory fervor – that the tide gradually turned, making it possible for Democrats to gain a firmer foothold in the Congress in 2006 and then to surge to victory in 2008.

So, on that frigid day in early 2009, there were many cheers for President Obama when he was sworn in and gave his Inaugural Address. But some of the greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the moment when Bush boarded a helicopter for his departure, what many in the crowd viewed as his getaway.

When Bush and Cheney finally left the scene – and the vast crowd began breaking up – the masses in this post-Bush/Cheney America actually had

the look of bedraggled survivors in a sci-fi disaster movie, dressed mostly in ragtag clothing – ski caps, parkas, boots and blankets – bent against the cold and trudging through streets largely devoid of traffic. Jeff and I were among them. Knowing the impossibility of using the Metro, we set off by foot, shuffling back toward Arlington, our feet numb, our bodies shivering.

We trudged south toward the Potomac River and picked our way past car barriers onto the 14th Street Bridge, part of the normally busy Interstate 395, except that only buses and official vehicles were using it on Inauguration Day. The bridge became an impromptu walkway with clumps of half-frozen pedestrians straggling across it, over the icy Potomac with a biting wind forcing people to tighten up their mufflers, tug down their ski caps and wrap themselves more firmly in their blankets.

After traversing the bridge, which seemed much, much longer than when I would cross it so often by car, Jeff and I found an exit ramp near the Pentagon, clambered over some road dividers, and worked our way down to Pentagon City and to my car. After driving home and sitting before a fire, it took much of the afternoon and evening for the cold to work its way out of our bodies.

Yet, as we were thawing – and Obama’s supporters were celebrating at Inaugural parties – the Republicans were already contemplating how to ensure the failure of the new President. Obama may have talked about his hope for a post-partisan politics and a nation coming together to confront a devastating financial crisis, but that is not what he would get.[\[2\]](#)

The Republicans had a playbook dating back to the last Democratic president, Bill Clinton, when they displayed their new tactics of total political warfare and deployed their extraordinary media clout to challenge Clinton’s “legitimacy.” They kept him constantly on the defensive with investigations, allegations and suspicions. That playbook would now be dusted off for President Obama, except in the intervening 16 years, the Right had buttressed its media power with Fox News and many top-of-the-line Internet sites.

Obama might have wanted political peace but he would get ideological war. The Republican Party, which barely two years earlier had been contemplating a permanent majority, was not about to accept the legitimacy of this child of a white mother from Kansas and a black father from Kenya.

Yes, the Republicans recognized that their past leader, George W. Bush, had messed up. But they had come too far to simply sit down with

Obama, this mixed-race interloper, and work on some compromises. It didn't matter that the country was facing the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression. Even if some old-time Republicans – the few remaining “moderates” – would consider that possibility, the right-wing infrastructure that had grown with the Republican Party over the past three decades would not allow it.

The Right's media machinery had its own imperatives. It fed on anger toward “lib-rhuls” and thrived on right-wing conspiracy theories. Like a voracious predator, this right-wing organism sized up Obama as prey. Politically speaking, he would be swarmed upon and torn limb from limb. He would be just a temporary obstacle to the grander Republican plan. Peace? There would be no peace.

Arguably, President Obama's biggest political misjudgment after his election was to give too much weight to his own rhetoric about a post-partisan Washington, one where the magnitude of the various crises would force the two sides to work together constructively. Or perhaps he simply had to behave that way because he had made so many promises on the campaign trail about how he would reach across the aisle.

If he didn't at least make the effort, he would stand accused of reneging on his pledges and reigniting the partisan wars. Of course, he could not avoid that outcome, nor could he avert the blame. Mainstream news outlets, like CNN, would frame the story as Obama's “failure” to end the partisan battles.

Even before taking office, Obama had signaled an eagerness for more continuity with the Bush administration than change, especially on national security and the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He kept in place Bush's Defense Secretary Robert Gates and retained Bush's senior military command structure, including the high-profile Gen. David Petraeus.

Both Gates and Petraeus were closely associated with Bush's 2007 “surge” of U.S. troops in Iraq, which received great credit from the Washington press corps for supposedly salvaging the Iraq disaster from defeat (although the actual reasons for the decline in violence in Iraq were much more complicated and, according to some military analysts, had little to do with adding 30,000 U.S. reinforcements).

Obama also selected for his Secretary of State the relatively hawkish Hillary Clinton, his rival for the Democratic nomination in 2008. When Obama faced early decisions about what to do with the worsening security situation in Afghanistan, these choices would insure that he would be boxed in with recommendations for a similar “surge” there.

But a bigger miscalculation may have been made less by Obama than by many of Obama’s supporters on the Left who unrealistically thought that his election would somehow fix things overnight, that the systemic political changes that the Right had engineered over four decades would just reverse themselves.

On that front, Obama could be blamed for raising hopes too much, but the simple fact was that American politics had been transformed by two elections in particular, one in 1968 when Richard Nixon defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey and the other in 1980 when Ronald Reagan crushed President Jimmy Carter. Nixon’s victory began the transformation of the Republican DNA, instilling a conscience-less ruthlessness focused only on getting and keeping political power. Reagan’s victory added the ideological component that “government is the problem.”

Combined with those two key victories came clever right-wing messaging, whether the exploitation of racial resentments among working-class whites or the alteration of the founding national narrative into a story of free-market selfishness. The GOP and its right-wing allies also set to work investing billions of dollars in a media out-reach infrastructure. Soon, the Right’s angry messages were everywhere, about how “big gov-mint” programs favored lazy minorities over hard-working “regular” people, i.e. whites. Other messaging blamed the nation’s problems on the interference of “bureaucrats” with the “free market.”

Especially given the failure of progressives to invest seriously in their own media infrastructure to counter these reactionary messages, the Right succeeded in setting the national agenda and rewriting the founding narrative. Again, the Left was caught flat-footed as the Right invested in “scholars” who delved back into the Revolutionary War era and cherry-picked quotes from key Founders that put the “free-market” extremism of the late 20 and early 21 centuries into a seamless context of America’s founding struggle. Unregulated capitalism was made synonymous with the Founders’ concept of “liberty.”

Beyond rewriting the founding narrative, the Right had great success in framing the story of recent American history. From the days of Richard Nixon, the Republicans had grown more and more ruthless in how they grabbed for political power but they also displayed greater and greater skill at concealing some of their more outrageous tactics, even ones that bordered on treason, going behind the backs of sitting Democratic presidents to sabotage their foreign policies.

In 1968, Nixon's campaign disrupted President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace talks while a half-million U.S. soldiers sat in the war zone. In 1980, the overwhelming evidence now indicates that Ronald Reagan's campaign pulled a similar stunt to sink President Jimmy Carter's negotiations to free 52 American hostages then held in Iran. These parallel operations exploited the perceived weaknesses of the two Democratic administrations, that Johnson had no serious plan to end the Vietnam War and that Carter had made America weak before its enemies.

The one big Republican miscalculation over this four-decade-plus era had been the Watergate break-in in 1972 and the botched cover-up which led to Nixon's resignation in 1974. But even that political disaster taught the Republicans valuable lessons about how to contain potential scandals. Indeed, the failure of Official Washington to fully comprehend the context of Watergate, especially its links to Nixon's earlier sabotage of the Vietnam peace talks, enshrined a dubious conventional wisdom that Watergate had been a one-off affair traceable to Nixon's personal paranoia.

The prevailing view after Nixon's resignation was that the national institutions – the press, Congress and the courts – had protected the Republic from a uniquely dangerous president, but that was only partly true. A misguided lesson from Watergate became a favorite Washington saying, that “the cover-up is worse than the crime.” Yet, if the full Watergate story were understood, it would have been clear that the broader crime encapsulated in Watergate was far worse than the cover-up.

As a setback for Republicans, the messy Watergate scandal was just a blip in a continuum that could be traced from Nixon's torpedoing Johnson's Vietnam peace process in 1968 through Reagan's similar tactics regarding Carter's Iran-hostage talks in 1980 to the readiness of the Republicans during Obama's presidency to hold the entire U.S. economy hostage, blocking legislation to reduce unemployment and then blaming Obama for the high unemployment.

Along the way, the Right constructed a media propaganda system that shielded Republicans from much of the accountability that they deserved, making sure there would be no repeat of the Watergate debacle, no future GOP president would be forced out of office by getting caught in a scandal. The mainstream Democrats also played their part in this national tragedy by looking the other way when evidence surfaced about serious Republican misconduct.

Through this era – from Nixon’s 1968 sabotage of the Vietnam peace talks to Obama’s determination to “look forward, not backward” regarding torture and other crimes of George W. Bush’s presidency – a recurring refrain from the Democrats was that a thorough airing of the dirty Republican laundry would not be “good for the country,” an approach that only encouraged the Republicans to be more audacious.

And, as the U.S. press corps became more careerist and less committed to the best principles of journalism, another important check disappeared. If the Founders were right that a functioning democracy required an informed electorate, then they also understood the corollary, that a system with a thoroughly misinformed population would be something quite different, something closer to a form of totalitarianism. It might retain the trappings of a democratic Republic but it would no longer be one.

In such a system, propaganda would systematically manipulate the voters, not just with an occasional lie or some *ad hoc* spin but with a consistent and unrelenting pattern of deception. A manufactured false history wouldn’t just trick people from time to time; it would be inserted in their minds to control their future political judgments.

This nightmarish end result can be averted – the Republic can be saved – but only if the national narrative is corrected and repaired, if the real story is known. Such an undertaking – to fix the broken American narrative – obviously is a larger task than any one book or any one author can achieve. I don’t pretend to be an expert on every facet of U.S. history. In that sense, I’m sure this book (and this author) will disappoint some readers because some issue – some false narrative that is deserving of correction – is not addressed in these pages. For that, I apologize in advance.

I have addressed other false narratives in my previous books: *Fooling America*, *Trick or Treason*, *Lost History*, *Secrecy & Privilege*, and *Neck Deep* (the last written with two of my sons, Sam and Nat). In those books, you can find more about the actual history of America, both the good and

the bad. But I believe that the historical accounts that are examined here represent important forks in the road for the American narrative. Straightening out these twisted pathways will give the people a better chance to find their way to a better place.

Chapter One: What the Framers Wanted

Having grown up in Northborough, Massachusetts, a town not far from Lexington and Concord, I never felt that the courageous stand that those patriots took against the British Crown was some dusty chapter of history. It was alive in my understanding of America. It was part of what liberty meant to me.

My favorite landmark in Northborough was a monument to General Henry Knox, the rotund logistical chief for General George Washington. Northborough's modest claim to Revolutionary War glory was that Knox and his men passed through the town in the winter of 1775-1776 as they dragged captured cannons from Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York along the roads that connected the little towns of central Massachusetts on the way to Dorchester Heights, where Washington used the cannons to drive the British from Boston.

Since childhood, I was interested in not only what happened in those remarkable days of revolution but why and how, especially the role that information played. Indeed, to comprehend how the militarily inexperienced and poorly equipped colonists could successfully challenge the most powerful empire of the age requires an understanding of how the upstart Americans outmaneuvered the British not only with irregular military tactics but with a superior use of words and intelligence.

There was, of course, the eloquent writing of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, inspiring the American people and expressing the noblest ideals of human freedom, but even earlier there was an appreciation of how information could turn the tide of a battle and history itself. One could look at the opening battles of the Revolutionary War as the two sides engaged with their competing intelligence capabilities, an 18 Century version of spy-vs.-spy in which each adversary had insights into the strategies of the other and both applied the communications technologies of the age in different ways. As in the actual war fighting, the British had the advantage of wealth and power, while the Americans relied on stealth and speed.

In the momentous month of April 1775, the patriots needed to know when and how the British were going to strike from their base in Boston against rebel leaders hiding in Lexington and to destroy the stores of munitions at Concord. Casual historians may recall “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” – which indeed was a dramatic part of thwarting the British surprise attack – but few recall the exploits of Dr. Joseph Warren, America’s first spymaster.

Though involved with the Sons of Liberty and a member of the Boston Committee of Correspondence, a key body in organizing the Revolution, Warren moved within Boston’s respected society as a physician and surgeon, a role that may have put him in place to recruit one of the most important and still mysterious spies in American history.

During the turbulent years leading up to hostilities, Warren had collaborated with fellow patriot Paul Revere in constructing a remarkable intelligence network for its time, a loosely knit collection of sympathetic citizens who uncovered information about the British garrisoned in Boston. The network also included riders who could spread alarms quickly through the countryside. Warren and Revere oversaw an effective system of propaganda, too, highlighting excesses committed by the British and pioneering the use of fast schooners to distribute their side of the story across the Atlantic, where there was a battle for the sympathies of British citizens and politicians.

The American intelligence network was tested in spring 1775 as the British prepared for what King George III hoped would be a decisive blow against the rebellious New Englanders, including the arrest of top leaders, John Hancock and Samuel Adams, hiding out in Lexington. Their whereabouts had been detected by British General Thomas Gage’s own spies. But the Warren-Revere network usually was a step ahead of Gage’s team. Keeping a close tab on British movements, the patriot spies learned two key facts, that British agents had scouted routes toward Concord and that British longboats were lowered into Boston Harbor on April 6.

On April 8, expecting an imminent attack, Warren prepared an urgent warning to the patriots in Concord, telling them that “we daily expect a Tumult” and that Concord would be the target with an assault possibly the next day. Revere carried Warren’s message by horseback. Although Warren’s date proved incorrect, he was right about one of the Redcoats’ key targets, Concord.

On his way back to Boston, Revere had the prescient thought that the British might try to seal off Boston before their attack and thus he devised a signal with patriots across the Charles River in Charlestown that could be used as a back-up plan. Lanterns would be hung from Boston's Old North Church, one if the attack came by land, two if by sea.

Gage soon learned from loyalist spies that Revere had carried Warren's message to Concord. So, in readying the April 19 march on Lexington and Concord, Gage dispatched mounted patrols of 20 officers and sergeants into the countryside on April 18 to cut off warnings from American riders trying to spread the alarm to local militias. The final chapter of this intelligence cat-and-mouse game would determine whether the British would retain an element of surprise, or whether Warren and Revere could ensure that the Redcoats would be met by an armed citizenry.

By the afternoon of April 18, a bustle of British activity in Boston had been detected by local residents sympathetic to the patriots. Reports were flowing into Warren's medical office, his make-shift intelligence headquarters.

As described by historian David Hackett Fischer in *Paul Revere's Ride*, "In the highly charged atmosphere of Boston, scarcely an hour passed without some new rumor or alarm. Doctor Warren had become highly skilled in diagnosing these political symptoms. On the afternoon of April 18, as these reports suddenly multiplied, he began to suspect that the Regulars were at last about to make the major move that had long been expected.

"Doctor Warren was a careful man, and he decided to be sure. For emergencies he had special access to a confidential informer, someone well connected at the uppermost levels of the British command. The identity of this person was a secret so closely guarded that it was known to Warren alone, and he carried it faithfully to his grave."

Amid the growing signs of a British attack, Warren turned to this source and obtained the details of the British plan, that the British would cross the Charles River by boat and then march to Lexington with the goal of capturing Samuel Adams and John Hancock and then on to Concord to burn the stores of weapons and ammunition.

Though the name of Warren's source remains a mystery, some historians have speculated, based on circumstantial evidence, that Warren's "deep throat" was Gage's wife, American-born Margaret Kemble Gage. She

was believed to have secret sympathies for the cause of independence and was distraught that her husband was under orders to use violence to crush the incipient rebellion. Mrs. Gage had confided to one friend that “she hoped her husband would never be the instrument of sacrificing the lives of her countrymen.” After the battles of Lexington and Concord, General Gage sent his wife back to England where they remained estranged even after Gage’s return home.

Armed with the confirmation from his source, Warren put his full intelligence apparatus in motion. On the evening of April 18, 1775, he passed a message to Revere, dispatching him to Lexington to warn Adams and Hancock. Aware that Gage had placed teams on horseback at key chokepoints along the route, Warren decided on multiple riders. He also called upon William Dawes and possibly a third message carrier.

Dawes managed to get past the British sentry at the Boston Neck just before the only land route out of Boston was shut down. Revere activated his plan to have two lanterns placed in the North Church steeple while he navigated his own escape from Boston over the Charles River and then by horse inland.

The patriots’ warning system proved successful. Alerted by Revere and Dawes, other riders set off across the New England countryside. Even though Revere was briefly captured by one of Gage’s roving teams, any British hope for surprise was gone by the time the Redcoats reached Lexington early on April 19. Hancock and Adams had already fled.

After a brief clash that killed eight militiamen on Lexington Green, the British continued inland to Concord, where they encountered more Massachusetts militiamen who fought the Redcoats at Concord’s North Bridge. That engagement started the British retreat back toward Lexington, as militias from across the region arrived to join the fight.

Somehow, Dr. Warren managed to slip out of Boston himself and met up with the growing rebel force. Warren joined General William Heath, a self-taught military strategist who devised the harassing attacks that inflicted heavy casualties on the British forces (some 73 were recorded killed) while minimizing those of Americans (49 dead). Warren narrowly escaped death himself when a musket bullet struck a pin of his wig. He is reported later to have told his worried mother that “where danger is, dear mother, there must your son be. Now is no time for any of America[’s] children to shrink from any hazard. I will set her free or die.”

Almost as soon as the British survivors had limped back into Boston, Warren and Revere began overseeing another important intelligence operation, the task of documenting what had happened and getting out the word. Nearly 100 depositions were taken from witnesses, including colonists who had come under fire at Lexington. They presented the clash as an unprovoked British attack on militiamen who were not blocking the Redcoats' route and who were beginning to disperse when the shooting began.

Captain John Parker, the militia commander, said he "ordered our Militia to meet on the Common in said Lexington to consult what to do, and concluded not to be discovered, nor meddle or make with said Regular Troops (if they should approach) unless they should insult or molest us; and, upon their [the British] sudden Approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse, and not to fire:—Immediately said Troops made their appearance and rushed furiously, fired upon, and killed eight of our Party without receiving any Provocation therefor from us."

The depositions were put into print, along with a letter from Dr. Warren addressed to the "Inhabitants of Great Britain." The patriot leaders had riders carry news of the battle down the American coast, but equally important, a fast American schooner took the news to England, where the documents were slipped to the mayor of London, who was considered sympathetic to the American cause. It was a masterstroke of 18th Century propaganda as the Americans got their depositions – and their side of the battles of Lexington and Concord – into the British press some two weeks before Gage's reports arrived by sea.

Back in America, the British forces were bottled up in Boston, and Dr. Warren was emerging as an important leader of the revolution. He was elected president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and was appointed general of the Massachusetts troops on June 14, 1775. However, on June 17, before his commission took effect, the British moved to break out of Boston by assaulting American militia forces dug in across the Charles River near Bunker Hill (actually at Breeds Hill).

Warren volunteered as a private soldier, rebuffing offers of a command position. He then put himself in the middle of the battle as two British infantry charges were repelled at great loss of life to the Redcoats. On the third charge, with the Americans out of ammunition and falling back, Warren rallied a final defense of the retreat and was shot in the head. He

was among 115 patriots who died. Another 305 were wounded. British losses were 226 dead, 828 wounded.

Warren's lifeless body was recognized by a British officer who had Warren's clothes stripped off and the body mutilated by bayonets before being dumped into a mass grave. Dr. Warren had just turned 34.

British Captain Walter Laurie, who had commanded British forces at Concord's North Bridge, was later quoted as saying that he "stuffed the scoundrel with another rebel into one hole, and there he and his seditious principles may remain." General Gage reportedly hailed Warren's death as an important blow against the rebellion, but Warren quickly became a martyr to the cause of freedom, exemplifying the willingness of Americans to give their lives for independence from the King of England.

When General Knox's cannons arrived in March 1776 and were positioned on Dorchester Heights, overlooking Boston Harbor, the new British commander, General William Howe, saw no choice but to withdraw. The British evacuated Boston on March 17, 1776.

After the war moved away from Boston, Paul Revere and two of Warren's brothers located the doctor's grave, exhumed his body (which Revere identified based on artificial teeth that he had wired into Warren's mouth) and reburied him in the Granary Burial Ground in Boston (Warren's remains were later moved to a family funeral vault in Jamaica Plain).

Though his sacrifice has faded from the national memory, Warren was an inspiration to many of his fellow patriots. As historian Fischer noted, Paul Revere named his next-born son, Joseph Warren Revere, and a portrait of Warren was kept in a place of honor over the parlor fireplace in the Adams family home. Warren also impressed on his fellow American revolutionaries the need for accurate intelligence about the enemy's planning and the value of using documented truth to rally the people of the world to a worthy cause.

Though it is easy to glorify the brave Americans who challenged the immense power of the British Empire, it is equally important – in placing their experience in the larger national narrative – to remember that they were flesh-and-blood individuals with practical needs. In resisting British tyranny and defying the dictates of King George III, they surely fought for a

noble cause, but history shows us that they were not ideologues who lived by political precepts alone. Both during the Revolution and the years that followed, they faced daunting challenges, not only securing national independence but finding ways to survive the personal hardships of a long and brutal war.

The Founders were real people with real problems. As the Revolution dragged on, many of its leading figures faced not only physical danger but financial ruin. They looked for ways to make ends meet even if they had to cut ethical corners. For example, one of the couples most widely revered for their contributions to the Revolution, John and Abigail Adams, resorted to a black-market scheme to raise enough money to avoid losing their home and property in Massachusetts.

Many of Abigail Adams's famous letters to her husband, as he served the revolutionary cause in Philadelphia and Europe, also included requisitions of supplies that could be sent back to Boston, along with his official correspondence via the fastest and safest means of American transportation. Abigail Adams then marked up the prices on the precious goods and sold them through a relative, Cotton Tufts Jr., so her involvement – and that of her husband – would not be revealed and provoke a possible scandal.

In retrospect, none of this should reflect badly on John and Abigail Adams, who sacrificed greatly for the revolutionary cause. They were simply doing what they had to do to make it through dangerous and difficult times.[\[3\]](#)

Similarly, General George Washington had a mix of personal and patriotic reasons for hating the Articles of Confederation, which governed the new United States through the difficult days of the Revolution and beyond. Since the Articles described the 13 states as “sovereign” and “independent,” there was no means of enforcing the states’ financial commitments to the Continental Army. Washington was reduced to pleading with the state assemblies to fulfill their promises of money and supplies for his desperate troops in the Continental Army.

Having watched his soldiers nearly starve and having to face down incipient mutinies, the commander-in-chief came to despise the very notion of state sovereignty and independence. Washington’s animosity continued through the early years of peace as the young country still confronted threats to its survival. “Thirteen sovereignties,” Washington wrote, “pulling

against each other, and all tugging at the federal head, will soon bring ruin to the whole.”[4]

With the weak central government of the Articles, the 13 states continued to squabble while powerful European rivals exploited those divisions, both with an eye toward grabbing North American territory and luring some states and regions into commercial alliances to the detriment of other states. Washington had his own eyes set on the need to develop territories to the West, where he and other wealthy Founders had land investments.

To access those undeveloped areas, Washington began work on a canal system that would extend the navigability of the Potomac River westward. In 1785, Washington established the Potowmack Company, which began digging crude canals on the Virginia side of the Potomac. But Washington recognized that any thought of a coordinated strategy for national development was encumbered by the national disorganization under the Articles of Confederation.

Washington found a valuable ally in fellow Virginian, James Madison, a slightly built, bookish aristocrat who had immersed himself in the history of governance and became the repository of knowledge about various theories, especially the concept of separation of powers promoted by the French political philosopher Montesquieu. Like Washington, Madison was frustrated by the Articles of Confederation’s emphasis on states’ rights.

In 1781, as a member of the Congress under the Articles, Madison introduced a radical amendment that “would have required states that ignored their federal responsibilities or refused to be bound by decisions of Congress to be compelled to do so by use of the army or navy or by the seizure of exported goods,” noted Chris DeRose in *Founding Rivals*. However, Madison’s plan – opposed by the powerful states – went nowhere.

Similarly, Madison lamented how the variety of currencies issued by the 13 states and the lack of uniform standards on weights and measures impeded trade. Again, he looked futilely toward finding federal solutions to these state problems. He further saw the need to develop a national strategy for the nation’s commercial development.

To give the central government the power to regulate national commerce, Madison sponsored a resolution in the Virginia legislature to

instruct the state's congressmen to support giving the federal government the authority to regulate commerce for 25 years.[\[5\]](#)

Madison's commerce resolution won the support of General Washington, who wrote to Madison: "The proposition in my opinion is so self evident that I confess I am at a loss to discover wherein lies the weight of the objection to the measure. We are either a united people, or we are not. If the former, let us, in all matters of a general concern act as a nation, which have national objects to promote, and a national character to support. If we are not, let us no longer act a farce by pretending it to be."

However, when the Virginia legislature slashed Madison's proposal for federal control of commerce from 25 years to 13 years, he voted against it as insufficient. His thoughts then turned to a more drastic scheme for consolidating power in the hands of the federal government, a constitutional convention.

On Dec. 9, 1785, Madison wrote to fellow Virginian James Monroe, "It is more probable that the other idea of a convention of commissioners from the states for deliberating on the state of commerce and the degree of power which ought to be lodged in Congress, will be attempted."[\[6\]](#)

The weakness of the central government continued to threaten the success of the young country as civil disorder arose in central and western Massachusetts with the Shays Rebellion in 1786 and continuing into early 1787. Finally, in spring 1787, a convention was called in Philadelphia to amend the Articles of Confederation, but Madison – with Washington's support – sprang on the convention his radical alternative, not simply some modifications to the Articles but an entirely new system that wiped away the Articles' language about the "independence" and "sovereignty" of the states.

As Madison explained to fellow Virginian Edmund Randolph in a letter of April 8, 1787, what was needed was a "national Government ... armed with a positive & compleat authority in all cases where uniform measures are necessary."

The broader point of the Constitutional Convention was that the United States must act as one nation, not a squabbling collection of states and regions. James Wilson from Pennsylvania reminded the delegates that "we must remember the language with which we began the Revolution: 'Virginia is no more, Massachusetts is no more, Pennsylvania is no more.

We are now one nation of brethren, we must bury all local interests and distinctions.’”

As Washington presided over the convention, it fell to Madison to supply the framework for the new system. On May 29, 1787, the first day of substantive debate at the Constitutional Convention, Randolph, presented Madison’s plan. Madison’s Commerce Clause was there from the start, except that instead of a 25-year grant of federal authority, the central government’s control of interstate commerce would be permanent.

Madison’s convention notes on Randolph’s presentation recount him saying that “there were many advantages, which the U. S. might acquire, which were not attainable under the confederation – such as a productive impost [or tax] – counteraction of the commercial regulations of other nations – pushing of commerce ad libitum – &c &c.”[\[7\]](#)

In other words, the Founders – at their most “originalist” moment – understood the value of the federal government taking action to negate the commercial advantages of other countries and to take steps for “pushing of [American] commerce.” The “ad libitum – &c &c” notation suggests that Randolph provided other examples off the top of his head.

Historian Bill Chapman has summarized Randolph’s point as saying “we needed a government that could co-ordinate commerce in order to compete effectively with other nations.” So, from the very start of the debate on a new Constitution, Madison and other key framers recognized that a legitimate role of the U.S. Congress was to ensure that the nation could match up against other countries economically and could address problems impeding the nation’s economic strength and welfare.

Through the hot summer of 1787, the Convention delegates debated Madison’s plan, amid the give-and-take of compromise, sometimes reining in Madison’s more radical ideas, such as his idea to give Congress veto power over state laws. That provision was dropped though federal statutes and treaties were made “the supreme law of the land” and thus federal courts could strike down state laws that were deemed in violation.

“Madison wanted the federal assembly to have a veto over the state assemblies,” wrote David Wootton, author of *The Essential Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers*. “Veto,es, however, are bad politics, and again and again they had to be abandoned in the course of turning drafts into agreed texts.”

Despite such concessions, the Constitution emerged from the secret meetings in Philadelphia as a stunning assertion of federal power. Madison and Washington had pushed through a governing structure that bestowed important powers on the central government – including the ability to tax, to print money, to control foreign policy, to conduct wars and to regulate interstate commerce.

Madison also came up with a plan for approving the Constitution that bypassed the state assemblies and instead called for special state conventions for ratification. He knew that if the Constitution went before the existing assemblies – with the obvious diminution of their powers – it wouldn't stand a chance to win the approval of the necessary nine states.

The drastic shift in the power relationships was a reality not lost on some influential politicians who favored a continuation of the states' "independence" and "sovereignty," wording that had disappeared in the Constitution. Anti-Federalists correctly recognized what had happened and soon rallied strong opposition to the new governing framework. The Anti-Federalists decried the broad and sometimes vague language that shifted the country away from a confederation of independent states to a system that made the central government supreme.

As dissidents from the Pennsylvania delegation wrote: "We dissent ... because the powers vested in Congress by this constitution, must necessarily annihilate and absorb the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the several states, and produce from their ruins one consolidated government. ...

"The new government will not be a confederacy of states, as it ought, but one consolidated government, founded upon the destruction of the several governments of the states. ... The powers of Congress under the new constitution, are complete and unlimited over the purse and the sword, and are perfectly independent of, and supreme over, the state governments; whose intervention in these great points is entirely destroyed. ...

"The new constitution, consistently with the plan of consolidation, contains no reservation of the rights and privileges of the state governments, which was made in the confederation of the year 1778, by article the 2nd, viz. 'That each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States in Congress assembled.' ...

“The legislative power vested in Congress ... is so unlimited in its nature; may be so comprehensive and boundless [in] its exercise, that this alone would be amply sufficient to annihilate the state governments, and swallow them up in the grand vortex of general empire.”

The Pennsylvania dissenters noted that the state sovereignty language from the Articles of Confederation was stripped out of the Constitution and that national sovereignty was implicitly transferred to “We the People of the United States” in the Preamble. They pointed out that the Constitution’s Article Six made federal statutes and treaties “the supreme law of the land.”[\[8\]](#)

Some Anti-Federalists charged that the President of the United States would have the powers of a monarch and that the states would be reduced to little more than vassals of the central authority. Others mocked the trust that Madison placed in his schemes of “checks and balances,” that is, having the different branches of government block others from committing any grave abridgement of liberties.

Famed Revolutionary War orator Patrick Henry, one of the leading Anti-Federalists, denounced Madison’s scheme of countervailing powers as “specious imaginary balances, your rope-dancing, chain-rattling, ridiculous ideal checks and contrivances.” Henry and other opponents favored scrapping the new Constitution and calling a second convention.

Though the Anti-Federalists were surely hyperbolic in some of their rhetoric, they were substantially correct in identifying the Constitution as a bold assertion of federal power and a major transformation from the previous system of state independence. For his part, Madison was not only the chief architect of this shift from state to national power, he even had favored a clearer preference for federal dominance with his veto idea over actions by state assemblies, the proposal that died in the compromising at Philadelphia.

However, Madison and other Federalists faced a more immediate political challenge in late 1787 and early 1788 – securing ratification of the new Constitution in the face of potent opposition from the Anti-Federalists. Madison was particularly concerned that a second convention would eliminate one of his pet features in the Constitution, granting the federal government control over interstate commerce.

Despite Madison’s ploy of requiring special ratifying conventions in the various states, the Anti-Federalists appeared to hold the upper hand in

key states, such as Virginia and New York. So, to defend the new Constitution, Madison joined with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay in anonymously composing the Federalist Papers, a series of essays which not only sought to explain what the Constitution would do but – perhaps more importantly – to rebut the accusations of the Anti-Federalists.

Indeed, the Federalist Papers are best understood not as the defining explanation of the Framers’ intent – since the actual words of the Constitution (contrasted with the Articles of Confederation) and the debates in Philadelphia speak best to that – but as an attempt to tamp down the political fury directed at the proposed new system.

Thus, when the Anti-Federalists thundered about the broad new powers granted the central government, Madison and his co-authors countered by playing down how radical the new system was and insisting that the changes were more tinkering with the old system than the total overhaul that they appeared to be.

Though Madison arguably was the most important advocate for the expansion of federal powers under the Constitution – and even wanted those powers to go further – some of his deferential comments in the Federalist Papers have been stretched by today’s descendants of the Anti-Federalists to argue that Madison was really one of them, an enemy of a strong central government.

For instance, today’s Libertarians and Tea Partiers distort Madison’s comments in Federalist Paper No. 45, entitled “The Alleged Danger From the Powers of the Union to the State Governments Considered,” in which Madison, using the pseudonym Publius, sought to minimize what the Constitution would do. He wrote:

“If the new Constitution be examined with accuracy, it will be found that the change which it proposes consists much less in the addition of NEW POWERS to the Union, than in the invigoration of its ORIGINAL POWERS. The regulation of commerce, it is true, is a new power; but that seems to be an addition which few oppose, and from which no apprehensions are entertained.

“The powers relating to war and peace, armies and fleets, treaties and finance, with the other more considerable powers, are all vested in the existing Congress by the Articles of Confederation. The proposed change does not enlarge these powers; it only substitutes a more effectual mode of administering them.”

Today's Right trumpets this essay and especially Madison's summation – that “the powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite” – but the Right ignores what Madison was trying to accomplish with his essay. He was trying to defuse the opposition. After all, if Madison really thought the Articles only needed some tinkering, why would he have insisted on throwing them out altogether along with their language about state “sovereignty” and “independence”?

Nor was it entirely accurate for Madison to suggest that replacing the federal government's toothless powers in the Articles with powers having real teeth in the Constitution was trivial. Under the Constitution, for instance, the printing of money became the exclusive purview of the federal government, not a minor change.

Madison also was a touch disingenuous when he dismissed the importance of the Commerce Clause, which gave the central government control over interstate commerce. Madison understood how important that federal authority was – and he was determined to protect it. (In modern times, the Commerce Clause has become perhaps the most controversial feature of the Constitution, serving as a foundation for federal activism ranging from Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal to Barack Obama's health-care reform.)

To cite Madison as an opponent of an activist federal government, today's Right must also ignore Federalist Paper No. 14 in which Madison envisioned major construction projects under the powers granted by the Commerce Clause. “[T]he union will be daily facilitated by new improvements,” Madison wrote. “Roads will everywhere be shortened, and kept in better order; accommodations for travelers will be multiplied and meliorated; an interior navigation on our eastern side will be opened throughout, or nearly throughout the whole extent of the Thirteen States.

“The communication between the western and Atlantic districts, and between different parts of each, will be rendered more and more easy by those numerous canals with which the beneficence of nature has intersected our country, and which art finds it so little difficult to connect and complete.”

What Madison is also demonstrating in that essay is a core reality about the Founders – that, by and large, they were practical men seeking to

build a strong and unified nation. Though the Right today plays games with notions of “originalism” and “strict construction” – pretending that the Framers wanted to lock the United States into a world of the late Eighteenth Century – the true “originalist” intent of the Constitution’s Framers was a forward-looking pragmatism. They were concerned about addressing the many challenges of a sprawling nation in a world with many external and internal dangers.

The Articles of Confederation – with their emphasis on the states’ powers – weren’t working, so Madison and the Constitutional Convention jettisoned that structure in favor of a system with a strong and energetic central government with the authority to build the young nation. They also made the new system flexible so it could respond to future, unanticipated problems as well.

In exalting this pragmatic approach, Alexander Hamilton, who had served as Washington’s chief of staff during the Revolution, mocked the Anti-Federalists who propounded fanciful notions of how the Constitution would lead the federal government to oppress the people. He wrote in Federalist Paper No. 31:

“The moment we launch into conjectures about the usurpations of the federal Government, we get into an unfathomable abyss, and fairly put ourselves out of the reach of all reasoning. Imagination may range at pleasure until it gets bewildered amid the labyrinths of an enchanted castle, and knows not on which side to turn to extricate itself from the perplexities into which it has so rashly adventured. Whatever may be the limits or modifications of the powers of the Union, it is easy to imagine an endless train of possible dangers; and by indulging an excess of jealousy and timidity, we may bring ourselves to a state of absolute skepticism and irresolution.”

Hamilton’s comments could as readily be applied to today’s Tea Party members who somehow see in federal regulation of the health-insurance industry or of investment banks nefarious assaults on the liberties of Americans. As the Tea Partiers dress up in Revolutionary War costumes, however, they are more representing the overheated alarms of the Anti-Federalists than the careful planning and reasoning of the Constitution’s Framers.

Yet, one cannot ignore that the Anti-Federalists served an important function in creating the governing framework that emerged from those

formative years. To win over skeptics, Madison and other Federalists agreed to have the first Congress adopt a Bill of Rights as the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

Still, after months of argument and that promise of a Bill of Rights, the Constitution barely survived. It narrowly eked through to passage in some key states, such as Massachusetts (187 to 168), New York (30 to 27) and Virginia (89 to 79). After getting elected to the new Congress, Madison then lived up to his word in getting the Bill of Rights enacted and sent to the states for ratification.

Today's Libertarian and Tea Party movements – in claiming the Framers were big opponents of a strong central government and favored states' rights – make much of the Tenth Amendment, which asserts that “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

But the Right's historical revisionists again miss the key point here. The Constitution already had granted broad powers to the federal government – including regulation of national commerce – so the states were left largely with powers over local matters.

To further appreciate how modest the Tenth Amendment concession was, you must compare its wording with Article II of the Articles of Confederation, which is what it replaced. Article II stated that “each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated.” In other words, the power relationship was flipped.

Instead of the states being firmly in control, the new central government would now set the supreme laws of the land with state “sovereignty” largely confined to local matters. Arguably, the most important American leader effecting this monumental change was James Madison, who strangely is now touted by the modern Anti-Federalists as an ideological fellow traveler.

In later years, Madison – like other Framers of the Constitution – switched sides in various debates over the practical limits of federal power. For instance, Madison joined with Thomas Jefferson in opposing

Hamilton's national bank, but then as Jefferson's secretary of state, Madison applied an expansive view of national authority in negotiating the Louisiana Purchase from France. Madison also shifted regarding the value of the national bank after his frustrating experiences as president during the War of 1812.

The struggles between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists also didn't end with those early disputes over how the new government should function. The battle lines formed again when it became clear to the agrarian South that its economic model, based on slavery and the production of raw materials, was losing ground to the growing industrial power of the North and the influence of the Emancipation movement.

In the early 1830s, Southern politicians led the "nullification" challenge to the federal government, asserting that states had the right to nullify federal laws, such as a tariff on manufactured goods. But this challenge was beaten back by President Andrew Jackson who threatened to deploy troops to South Carolina to enforce the federal supremacy established by the Constitution.

In December 1832, Jackson denounced the "nullifiers" and declared "the power to annul a law of the United States, assumed by one State, incompatible with the existence of the Union, contradicted expressly by the letter of the Constitution, unauthorized by its spirit, inconsistent with every principle on which it was founded, and destructive of the great object for which it was formed."

Jackson also rejected as "treason" the notion that states could secede if they wished, noting that the Constitution "forms a *government* not a league," a reference to a line in the Articles of Confederation that had termed the fledgling United States "a firm league of friendship" among the states, not a national government.

Jackson's nullification crisis was resolved nonviolently, but a few decades later, the South's continued resistance to the constitutional preeminence of the federal government led to secession and the formation of the Confederacy. It took the Union's victory in the Civil War to firmly settle the issue of the sovereignty of the national Republic over the independence of the states.

However, the defeated South still balked at the principle of equal rights for blacks and invoked "states' rights" to defend segregation during the Jim

Crow era. White Southerners amassed enough political clout, especially within the Democratic Party, to fend off civil rights for blacks.

The battle over states' rights was joined again in the 1950s when the federal government finally committed itself to enforcing the principle of "equal protection under the law" as prescribed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Many white Southerners were furious that their system of segregation was being dismantled by federal authority.

Southern rightists and libertarians insisted that federal laws prohibiting denial of voting rights for blacks and outlawing segregation in public accommodations were unconstitutional, citing the Tenth Amendment. But federal courts ruled that Congress was within its rights in banning such discrimination within the states, with Madison's Commerce Clause playing a key role in the legal arguments.

The anger of Southern whites was reflected in the prevalence of the Confederate battle flag on pickup trucks and in store windows. Gradually, however, the American Right retreated from outright support of racial segregation and muffled the rhetorical threats of secession (although the idea still surfaces once in a while as it did in comments by Texas Gov. Rick Perry in 2011).

Instead of fiery talk about secession, the Right has sought to impose a reinterpretation of the Constitution by using the increasingly powerful right-wing media to revise the history of the United States and pretend that Madison and other Framers designed the Constitution as a document to establish the authority of the states to defy the federal government.

In recent decades, the American Right has sought to rewrite the founding narrative of the United States through selective "scholarship," by snatching a few quotes out of context and then relying on a vast propaganda machine (and much ignorance about U.S. history) to turn the Constitution inside out.

According to the Right's revisionist narrative, the Framers of the Constitution met in Philadelphia for the purpose of tightly restricting the powers of the national government and broadly empowering the states – when the actual intent of the Constitutional Convention was nearly the opposite. This revisionist view is now at the heart of the Tea Party movement and was reflected in comments by the Republican presidential field in 2012.

Rep. Ron Paul of Texas insisted that much of what the federal government has done domestically in recent decades has been unconstitutional and in violation of the founding principles. Former House Speaker (and self-proclaimed historian) Newt Gingrich declared, “I believe in the Constitution; I believe in the Federalist Papers. Obama believes in Saul Alinsky and secular European socialist bureaucracy.”

Yet, for all the Right’s talk about the Founders, you’d think the Republican presidential hopefuls would at least have a rudimentary knowledge about the historic events that led to the Revolution, especially one contender who served as governor of Massachusetts for four years in the capital city of Boston.

In his book, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*, Mitt Romney wrote that the Revolutionary War began in April 1775 when the British attacked Boston by sea. “In April 1775, British warships laid siege on Boston Harbor and successfully took command of the city,” Romney wrote.

However, in the actual history, the British military controlled Boston long before April 1775, garrisoning Redcoats in the rebellious city since 1768. The British clamped down more tightly after the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, imposing the so-called “Intolerable Acts” in 1774, reinforcing the Boston garrison and stopping commerce into Boston Harbor. The aggressive British actions forced dissident leaders Sam Adams and John Hancock to flee the city and take refuge in Lexington, as colonial militias drilled as citizen soldiers and built up their stocks of arms and ammunition in nearby Concord.

The Revolutionary War began not with British forces seizing Boston in April 1775, as Romney wrote, but when the Redcoats ventured forth from Boston on April 19, 1775, to seize Adams and Hancock in Lexington and then go farther inland to destroy the colonial arms cache in Concord. The British failed in both endeavors, but touched off the war by killing eight Massachusetts men at Lexington Green.

The Redcoats then encountered a larger force of Minutemen near Concord Bridge and were driven back in a daylong retreat to Boston, suffering heavy losses. Thus, the Revolutionary War began with a stunning American victory, not with the American defeat that Romney described.

In misreporting the start of the Revolution, Romney joined some of his 2012 rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, Texas Gov. Rick

Perry and Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann, in getting basic facts about America's Founding wrong. Perry put the American Revolution in the 1500s and Bachmann placed the opening battle in New Hampshire, not Massachusetts.

"The reason that we fought the revolution in the 16 Century was to get away from that kind of onerous crown if you will," Perry said, missing the actual date for the war for independence by two centuries and even placing it before the first permanent English settlement in the New World, Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, the first decade of the 17 Century.

While pandering to Tea Party voters in New Hampshire, Bachmann declared, "You're the state where the shot was heard around the world in Lexington and Concord." (She may have gotten confused because there is a Concord, New Hampshire, as well as a Concord, Massachusetts.)

However, one can almost excuse such historical ignorance coming from two public officials who live far away from the historic events. It was harder to comprehend how Romney, who lived in Massachusetts much of his adult life and was governor of the state for four years, could get such a basic historical fact – how the Revolutionary War began – wrong.

Key events, including Dr. Joseph Warren dispatching Paul Revere and William Dawes to warn the countryside of the British attack, occurred virtually within eye sight of Boston's Beacon Hill where the State House sits. These also are events that are near the heart of every Bay State citizen and are celebrated each April with the Boston Marathon on the Patriots Day holiday.

Yet, Romney committed to writing – in a book that he claimed to have personally authored – an account of the start of the Revolutionary War that is upside down. He has British warships attacking and capturing Boston, a British victory, rather than the Redcoats being bloodied by the Minutemen at Concord and driven back into Boston, an American victory.

More typically, the Right's "historians" will jump from the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the U.S. Constitution in 1787, while skipping over the Articles of Confederation, which governed the United States from 1777 to 1787. The reason to avoid the Articles is that otherwise the Right must deal with the reality that the Constitution obliterated much of the states' rights contained in the Articles. That, in turn, would destroy the bogus narrative about the Constitution being formulated for the purpose of enshrining states' rights and tightly constraining the federal government.

The real history doesn't fit with the Right's narrative so it is bypassed and changed.

Serious conservative jurists – even if they may disagree with some of the policies passed under the Commerce Clause and other constitutional powers – recognize that the Framers did approve broad powers for Congress and the central government. In a precise reading of the Constitution, the Commerce Clause has no specific limitation, in part, because the Framers wanted to give the elected branches of government the ability to address national problems as they arose.

Thus, such conservative stalwarts as senior U.S. Appeals Court Judge Laurence Silberman, an appointee of Ronald Reagan, and Reagan's Solicitor General Charles Fried both affirmed the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act's mandate on citizens to buy health insurance by applying a strict constructionist reading of the Commerce Clause.

In an Appeals Court ruling on November 8, 2011, Silberman took pains to note the unrestricted wording of the Commerce Clause. He wrote: "We look first to the text of the Constitution. Article I, § 8, cl. 3, states: 'The Congress shall have Power . . . To *regulate Commerce* with foreign Nations, *and among the several States*, and with the Indian Tribes.'" [Emphasis added by Silberman]

Silberman continued: "At the time the Constitution was fashioned, to 'regulate' meant, as it does now, '[t]o adjust by rule or method,' as well as '[t]o *direct*.' To 'direct,' in turn, included '[t]o prescribe certain measure[s]; to mark out a certain course,' and '[t]o order; to command.' In other words, to 'regulate' can mean to require action, and nothing in the definition appears to limit that power only to those already active in relation to an interstate market. Nor was the term 'commerce' limited to only *existing* commerce. There is therefore no textual support for appellants' argument" that mandating the purchase of health insurance is unconstitutional.[\[9\]](#)

To repeat Silberman's conclusion: "There is therefore no textual support" in the Constitution for challenging the individual mandate as unconstitutional. At that point, "strict constructionists" should have begun folding their tents – or got to work on a constitutional amendment to rewrite the Commerce Clause.

A similar conclusion was reached by former Solicitor General Fried in a March 28, 2012, interview with the *Washington Post's* Ezra Klein. When asked about whether there was a “limiting principle” on the Commerce Clause, Fried responded:

“The limiting principle point kind of begs the question. It assumes there’s got to be some kind of articulatable limiting principle and that’s in the Constitution somewhere. What Chief Justice John Marshall said in 1824 is that if something is within the power of Congress, Congress may exercise that power to its fullest extent. So the question is really whether this is in the power of Congress. Now, is it within the power of Congress?

“Well, the power of Congress is to regulate interstate commerce. Is health care commerce among the states? Nobody except maybe [Supreme Court Justice] Clarence Thomas doubts that. So health care is interstate commerce. Is this a regulation of it? Yes. End of story.”

When asked if Supreme Court observers, who had initially considered the constitutional challenge to the health-care law frivolous, had “underestimated the politicization of the Judiciary,” Fried answered: “Politics, politics, politics. You look at the wonderful decision by [federal Judge] Jeff Sutton, who is as much of a 24-karat gold conservative as anyone could be. He is a godfather to the Federalist Society. Look at his opinion [in the Sixth Circuit upholding the law]. Or look at Larry Silberman’s opinion. I don’t understand what’s gotten into people. Well, I do I’m afraid, but it’s politics, not anything else.”[\[10\]](#)

Yet, despite the Framers’ decision to include no “limiting principle” in the Commerce Clause, the five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012 decided there needed to be one anyway. During oral arguments on the Affordable Care Act, the Republicans raised hypothetical possibilities, such as whether Congress had the theoretical power to mandate that Americans buy broccoli.

That sort of Tea Party rhetoric carried over into their ruling on June 28, 2012, with all five rejecting the Commerce Clause as justification for the law’s individual mandate – although Chief Justice John Roberts joined with the four Democrats in letting the law stand by citing the congressional power to tax.

Still, by joining with the four other Republicans in slapping down use of the Commerce Clause, Roberts, in effect, turned the Right’s false founding narrative into Supreme Court precedent. Like his four right-wing

colleagues, Roberts was professionally born and raised in the Right's incubator of manufactured history.

Fitting with that false narrative, Roberts referenced Madison's Federalist Paper No. 45, in which Madison sought to play down how radical a transformation, from state to federal power, he had engineered in the Constitution. Roberts offered a curious twist on Madison's comment that "the regulation of commerce, it is true, is a new power; but that seems to be an addition which few oppose, and from which no apprehensions are entertained." In his ruling, Roberts interpreted that to mean that the Commerce Clause should never contribute to any controversy.

Regarding Silberman's erudite commentary on how dictionaries of the late Eighteenth Century defined "regulate," Roberts arbitrarily decided to throw out certain definitions — such as "[t]o order; to command" — because, he said, they were not among the top definitions in the dictionaries of that era and thus "It is unlikely that the Framers had such an obscure meaning in mind when they used the word 'regulate.'"

In an angry dissent against Roberts for nevertheless joining with the four Democrats in upholding the Affordable Care Act, Justice Antonin Scalia and the three other Republican Justices — Anthony Kennedy, Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas — put the Right's bogus founding narrative front and center. Scalia's dissent cited no less an authority on the Constitution than one of its key Framers, Alexander Hamilton, as supporting the foursome's concern about the overreach of Congress in regulating commerce.

Scalia wrote: "If Congress can reach out and command even those furthest removed from an interstate market to participate in the market, then the Commerce Clause becomes a font of unlimited power, or in Hamilton's words, 'the hideous monster whose devouring jaws . . . spare neither sex nor age, nor high nor low, nor sacred nor profane.'" Scalia footnoted Hamilton's Federalist Paper No. 33.

For a casual reader, that might have sounded pretty authoritative. Here's Hamilton, one of the strongest advocates for the Constitution, offering a prescient warning about "Obamacare" from the distant past of 1788. Except that Scalia and his cohorts were faking Hamilton's meaning. In Federalist Paper No. 33, Hamilton was not writing about the Commerce Clause. He was referring to clauses in the Constitution that grant Congress

the power to make laws that are “necessary and proper” for executing its powers and that establish federal law as “the supreme law of the land.”

Hamilton also wasn’t condemning those powers, as Scalia and his associates pretended. Hamilton was defending the two clauses by poking fun at the Anti-Federalist alarmists who had stirred up opposition to the Constitution with warnings about how it would trample America’s liberties. In the cited section of No. 33, Hamilton is saying the two clauses had been unfairly targeted by “virulent invective and petulant declamation.”

It is in that context that Hamilton complains that the two clauses “have been held up to the people in all the exaggerated colors of misrepresentation as the pernicious engines by which their local governments were to be destroyed and their liberties exterminated; as the hideous monster whose devouring jaws would spare neither sex nor age, nor high nor low, nor sacred nor profane.”

In other words, the dissent from Scalia and the three other right-wing justices not only applied Hamilton’s comments to the wrong section of the Constitution but reversed their meaning. Hamilton was mocking those who were claiming that these clauses would be “the hideous monster.” It was ironic indeed that Hamilton’s words, countering alarmist warnings from his era’s conservatives, would be distorted by this era’s conservatives to spread new alarms about the powers of the Constitution.

As demonstrated by Scalia’s willingness to turn Hamilton’s phrase inside-out, a key part of the political crisis facing the United States in 2012 was that the Right – from loud-mouth talkers on Fox News to jurists wearing black robes in august courtrooms – had separated themselves from empirical reality. They had become ideologues who embraced the ethos of propaganda, a willingness to change anything into anything in support of right-wing doctrine. To them, if a false history has to be manufactured, so be it. All for the cause.

The manipulation of legal principles to achieve partisan or ideological ends was clearly there in December 2000, too, when a subset of the Supreme Court’s right-wing majority (Kennedy, Scalia and Thomas along with the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist and now-retired Justice Sandra Day O’Connor) dressed up the *Bush v. Gore* ruling with a lot of legal references.

However, it was really a partisan power-play as those five Republicans divined a previously unknown principle in the Fourteenth Amendment

requiring that when a Republican presidential candidate is in danger of losing an election, then all the voting procedures in the key deciding state must have been identical, precinct to precinct. If they weren't – and they never are – the GOP candidate wins.[\[11\]](#)

Yet, this right-wing graffiti of false propaganda and fake constitutional arguments has been spray-painted on the walls of American politics for years. But most mainstream pundits have averted their eyes for fear that facing the reality of politicized courts might require some career-endangering courage. Similarly, much of the Washington Establishment simply has refused to confront this dangerous new reality.

In contrast to the fury of Scalia *et al* in the right-wing dissent on the Affordable Care Act, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the four Democrats on the Supreme Court, explained in a far more moderate tone that the Commerce Clause was not some afterthought of the Framers but rather one of Madison's most cherished ideas.

Citing a 1983 ruling entitled *EEOC v. Wyoming*, Ginsburg noted that “the Commerce Clause, it is widely acknowledged, ‘was the Framers’ response to the central problem that gave rise to the Constitution itself.’” That problem was a lack of national coordination on economic strategy, which hindered the country's development and made the nation more vulnerable to commercial exploitation by European powers, which looked to divide and weaken the newly independent United States.

Ginsburg wrote: “Under the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution's precursor, the regulation of commerce was left to the States. This scheme proved unworkable, because the individual States, understandably focused on their own economic interests, often failed to take actions critical to the success of the Nation as a whole.”

As Ginsburg noted, Alexander Hamilton explained the commerce problem this way: “[Often] it would be beneficial to all the states to encourage, or suppress, a particular branch of trade, while it would be detrimental . . . to attempt it without the concurrence of the rest.” And she cited Madison, who wrote, regarding the failings of the Articles, that as a result of the “want of concert in matters where common interest requires it,” the “national dignity, interest, and revenue [have] suffered.”

The nation's founding pragmatism was relevant in another way to the Affordable Care Act's mandate on individuals to purchase health insurance. During the Supreme Court oral arguments, Scalia and his Republican colleagues protested such a mandate as unconstitutional by offering hypothetical possibilities about what Congress might require if the Affordable Care Act's mandate were allowed to stand, justified by the Commerce Clause. The right-wing justices talked a lot about required purchases of broccoli, burial insurance, cars, cell phones, *etc.*

However, during the Second Congress in 1792, James Madison and George Washington helped push through the Militia Acts requiring citizens to buy muskets and other military supplies. In other words, just four years after ratification of the U.S. Constitution, Madison and Washington – two key Framers of the document – saw nothing wrong with mandating Americans to buy certain products in the private market. It was simply a practical way for the government to arm militias to put down insurrections and defend against foreign enemies.

This historical precedent should have been especially impressive to the so-called “originalists” – like Justice Scalia – who insist that only actions reflective of the Framers' original vision can be constitutional. But here was this stubborn historical fact, that Madison, as a member of the Second Congress, and Washington, as the first President, had supported the Militia Acts of 1792, which gave each able-bodied white male of fighting age six months to “provide himself with a good musket or firelock, a sufficient bayonet and belt, two spare flints, and a knapsack, a pouch, with a box therein, to contain not less than twenty four cartridges, suited to the bore of his musket or firelock, each cartridge to contain a proper quantity of powder and ball.”

Granted, the law was passed under Article Two powers of the Executive, which makes the President the Commander in Chief of the military, not Article One's Commerce Clause, which grants Congress unrestricted power to regulate interstate commerce. But the principle is the same, that the government can order Americans to buy something that Congress deemed necessary for the country's good.

As for the argument that the musket precedent shouldn't apply because it was so long ago, that should have been exactly the point when Scalia and the other Republican justices weighed the constitutionality of the health insurance mandate. If mandates were okay for Madison, the Constitution's

architect, and Washington, who presided at the Constitutional Convention, then that should be determinative on the question of whether mandates passed constitutional muster with the Framers. Madison and Washington – along with other men in the Second Congress and inside Washington’s Executive Branch – were, like, the actual Framers.

Unlike the petty partisans of today, most Framers of the Constitution were profoundly pragmatic individuals. Sure, they cared about liberty (at least for white males), but they also were driven by the need to build a strong nation that could maintain its independence against the encroachment of European powers. That was why Madison had proposed the strong Commerce Clause in the first place. He understood that only national action and coordination could enable the United States to marshal its resources properly and fend off Europe’s predatory economic tactics.

In that sense, the Affordable Care Act fit the original intent of the Commerce Clause, to keep U.S. industry competitive with international rivals. Since U.S. companies often provide health insurance as part of their compensation packages, one of the heaviest burdens on U.S. companies – in relation to foreign competitors – is the soaring cost of health care that has made American products more expensive relative to the goods from companies in countries where general revenues from taxes pay for health care.

The Constitution also explicitly empowers the federal government “to promote the general Welfare” – and when tens of millions of Americans are without affordable health care and tens of thousands are dying each year because they can’t afford to see a doctor, that is surely an impediment to “the general Welfare.” But what is perhaps most striking when comparing the founding era of the United States to today’s politicized and petty times is the stunning loss of practicality and common sense.

In the early days, the Founders were interested in finding ways to build the nation. Now, partisans – like Scalia, Fox News and the Tea Party – are about scoring debating points and demeaning national unity. The original Tea Party in 1773 and the “Don’t Tread on Me” flags were directed at British imperialists in support of American independence, but today they are repackaged as attacks on the U.S. government, the same institution that the Founders created so they could start building a strong and independent nation. Up has become down.

The real historic counterpoints to the anti-British Tea Party and “Don’t Tread on Me” flags were the “Join, or Die” banner demanding American unity and the Constitutional Convention in 1787, which repudiated the states-rights-dominated Articles of Confederation in favor of a vibrant central government in the U.S. Constitution. But that isn’t history that helps the Right’s propagandists because it reveals the Framers to be dedicated to a constructive central government seeking pragmatic solutions to the country’s problems, not to free-market extremism regardless of its harm to the nation’s fabric.

Because the real history doesn’t work for today’s Right, it has spent much time and money turning the history inside-out. For years, bright young ideologues have earned handsome salaries scouring the historical record to cherry-pick a few out-of-context quotes to bend the founding narrative rightward.

This historical revisionism is a testament both to how much money the Right has dedicated to propaganda and to its appreciation of the power derived from national mythology. The Right has embraced Orwell’s insight that “Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.”

So, the Right continues to shape-shift the Framers of the Constitution (and more broadly the nation’s Founders) into ideologues who despised government and cared only about individual liberty. But the actual history reveals them to be pragmatic individuals who viewed government as a crucial force for organizing the new society and building a strong nation.

In other words, if there was a dominant “originalist” notion of how the nation’s governance should work, it was pragmatism; it was pulling together to get done what needed to be done. The key Founders were not wedded to some fixed economic ideology or some extreme vision of liberty. Most likely, Washington and Madison would be shocked by the ideological extremism that has been superimposed on their practical attempts to find a way forward for the nation and to make it more competitive in the world.

One might reflect again upon Washington’s letter supporting Madison’s original idea for a Commerce Clause: “We are either a united people, or we are not. If the former, let us, in all matters of a general concern act as a nation, which have national objects to promote, and a national character to support. If we are not, let us no longer act a farce by pretending it to be.”

Chapter Two: Nixon's 'Treason'

On May 14, 1973, Walt W. Rostow, who had been national security adviser during some of the darkest days of the Vietnam War, typed a three-page "memorandum for the record" summarizing a secret file that his former boss, President Lyndon Johnson, had amassed on what may have been Richard Nixon's dirtiest trick, the sabotaging of Vietnam peace talks to win the 1968 election. Rostow reflected, too, on what effect LBJ's public silence may have had on the then-unfolding Watergate scandal.

As Rostow composed his memo in spring 1973, President Nixon's Watergate cover-up was unraveling. Just two weeks earlier, Nixon had fired White House counsel John Dean and accepted the resignations of two top aides, H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. Three days after Rostow wrote the memo, the Senate Watergate hearings opened as the U.S. government lurched toward a constitutional crisis.

Yet, as he typed, Rostow had a unique perspective on the worsening scandal. He understood the subterranean background to Nixon's political espionage operations. Those secret activities surfaced with the arrest of the Watergate burglars in June 1972, but they had begun much earlier.

In his memo for the record, Rostow expressed regret that he and other top Johnson aides had chosen – for what they had deemed "the good of the country" – to keep quiet about Nixon's Vietnam peace-talk sabotage, which Johnson had privately labeled "treason."

"I am inclined to believe the Republican operation in 1968 relates in two ways to the Watergate affair of 1972," Rostow wrote. He noted, first, that Nixon's operatives may have judged that their "enterprise with the South Vietnamese" – in frustrating Johnson's last-ditch peace initiative – had secured Nixon his narrow margin of victory over Democratic Vice President Hubert Humphrey in 1968.

"Second, they got away with it," Rostow wrote. "Despite considerable press commentary after the election, the matter was never investigated fully. Thus, as the same men faced the election in 1972, there was nothing in their previous experience with an operation of doubtful propriety (or, even, legality) to warn them off, and there were memories of how close an

election could get and the possible utility of pressing to the limit – and beyond.”[12]

Rostow also was aware that – as the Watergate scandal deepened in late 1972 and early 1973 – Nixon’s men had curiously approached the retired President Johnson with veiled threats about going public with their knowledge that Johnson had ordered wiretaps to spy on their Vietnam peace sabotage in 1968. Apparently, Nixon thought he could bully Johnson into helping shut down the Watergate probe. Instead, the threat had infuriated Johnson, who was still pained by his failure to end the Vietnam War before he left office on January 20, 1969, a tragic lost opportunity that he blamed on Nixon’s treachery and deceit.

Just a couple of weeks after Nixon’s strange overture about the 1968 bugging and two days after Nixon was sworn in for a second term, Johnson died of a heart attack on January 22, 1973. So, in spring 1973, Rostow found himself in a curious position. As Johnson’s presidency ended in 1969 – and at Johnson’s instruction – Rostow had taken with him the White House file chronicling Nixon’s Vietnam gambit, consisting of scores of “secret” and “top secret” documents. Rostow had labeled the file “The ‘X’ Envelope.”[13]

Also, by May 1973, Rostow had been out of government for more than four years and had no legal standing to possess this classified material. Johnson, who had ordered the file removed from the White House, had died. And, now, a major political crisis was unfolding about which Rostow felt he possessed an important missing link for understanding the history and the context. So what to do?

Rostow apparently struggled with this question for the next month as the Watergate scandal continued to expand. On June 25, 1973, John Dean delivered his blockbuster Senate testimony, claiming that Nixon got involved in the cover-up within days of the June 1972 burglary at the Democratic National Committee. Dean also asserted that Watergate was just part of a years-long program of political espionage directed by Nixon’s White House.

The very next day, as headlines of Dean’s testimony filled the nation’s newspapers, Rostow reached his conclusion about what to do with “The ‘X’ Envelope.” In longhand, he wrote a “Top Secret” note which read, “To be opened by the Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, not earlier than fifty (50) years from this date June 26, 1973.”[14]

In other words, Rostow intended this missing link of American history to stay missing for another half century. In a typed cover letter to LBJ Library director Harry Middleton, Rostow wrote:

“Sealed in the attached envelope is a file President Johnson asked me to hold personally because of its sensitive nature. In case of his death, the material was to be consigned to the LBJ Library under conditions I judged to be appropriate. The file concerns the activities of Mrs. [Anna] Chennault and others before and immediately after the election of 1968. At the time President Johnson decided to handle the matter strictly as a question of national security; and in retrospect, he felt that decision was correct. ...

“After fifty years the Director of the LBJ Library (or whomever may inherit his responsibilities, should the administrative structure of the National Archives change) may, alone, open this file. ... If he believes the material it contains should not be opened for research [at that time], I would wish him empowered to re-close the file for another fifty years when the procedure outlined above should be repeated.”[\[15\]](#)

Ultimately, however, the LBJ Library didn't wait that long. After a little more than two decades, on July 22, 1994, the envelope was opened and the archivists began the process of declassifying the contents. (Some documents, including what appears to be the oldest document in the file, an August 3, 1968, “top secret” memo from White House national security aide Bromley Smith to Johnson, remain partially or wholly classified to this day.[\[16\]](#))

Still, the dozens of declassified documents revealed a dramatic story of hardball politics played at the highest levels of government and with the highest of stakes, not only the outcome of the pivotal 1968 presidential election but the fate of a half million U.S. soldiers then sitting in the Vietnam war zone.

Relying on national security wiretaps of the South Vietnamese Embassy in Washington and surveillance of right-wing China Lobby activist Anna Chennault, Johnson concluded that Nixon's Republican presidential campaign was colluding with South Vietnamese President Nguyen van Thieu to derail the Paris peace talks and thus deny a last-minute boost to Democratic presidential nominee, Vice President Humphrey.

At the time, Johnson thought a peace breakthrough was near, one that could have ended a war which had already claimed the lives of more than

30,000 American troops and countless Vietnamese. Nixon, like Humphrey, was receiving briefings on the progress as the negotiations gained momentum in October 1968.

The Johnson administration was encouraged when North Vietnam agreed on a framework for peace talks. However, America's South Vietnamese allies began to balk over details about how the negotiations would be conducted, objecting to any equal status for the South Vietnamese Viet Cong insurgents. "Top Secret" reports from the National Security Agency informed President Johnson that South Vietnam's President Thieu was closely monitoring the political developments in the United States with an eye toward helping Nixon win the November 5 election.

For instance, an October 23, 1968, report – presumably based on NSA's electronic eavesdropping – quotes Thieu as saying that the Johnson administration might halt the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam as part of a peace maneuver that would help Humphrey's campaign but that South Vietnam might not go along. Thieu also appreciated the other side of the coin, that Johnson's failure would help Nixon.

"The situation which would occur as the result of a bombing halt, without the agreement of the [South] Vietnamese government ... would be to the advantage of candidate Nixon," the NSA report on Thieu's thinking read. "Accordingly, he [Thieu] said that the possibility of President Johnson enforcing a bombing halt without [South] Vietnam's agreement appears to be weak."[\[17\]](#)

By October 28, 1968, according to another NSA report, Thieu said "it appears that Mr. Nixon will be elected as the next president" and that any settlement with the Viet Cong should be put off until "the new president" was in place.[\[18\]](#)

The next day, October 29, national security adviser Walt Rostow received the first indication that Nixon might actually be coordinating with Thieu to sabotage the peace talks. Rostow's brother, Eugene, who was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, wrote a memo about a tip from a source in New York who had spoken with "a member of the banking community" who was "very close to Nixon."[\[19\]](#)

The source said Wall Street bankers – at a working lunch to assess likely market trends and to decide where to invest – had been given inside information about the prospects for Vietnam peace and were told that Nixon was obstructing that outcome.

“The conversation was in the context of a professional discussion about the future of the financial markets in the near term,” Eugene Rostow wrote. “The speaker said he thought the prospects for a bombing halt or a cease-fire were dim, because Nixon was playing the problem as he did the Fortas affair – to block. ...

“They would incite Saigon to be difficult, and Hanoi to wait. Part of his strategy was an expectation that an offensive would break out soon, that we would have to spend a great deal more (and incur more casualties) – a fact which would adversely affect the stock market and the bond market. NVN [North Vietnamese] offensive action was a definite element in their thinking about the future.”[\[†\]](#)

In other words, Nixon’s friends on Wall Street were placing their financial bets based on the inside dope that Johnson’s peace initiative was doomed to fail. In another document, Walt Rostow identified his brother’s source, who disclosed this strategy session, as Alexander Sachs, who was then on the board of Lehman Brothers.[\[20\]](#)

A separate memo from Eugene Rostow said the speaker had added that Nixon “was trying to frustrate the President, by inciting Saigon to step up its demands, and by letting Hanoi know that when he [Nixon] took office ‘he could accept anything and blame it on his predecessor.’” So, according to the source, Nixon was trying to convince both the South and North Vietnamese that they would get a better deal if they stalled Johnson.[\[21\]](#)

In his later memo to the file, Walt Rostow recounted that he learned this news shortly before attending a morning meeting at which President Johnson was informed by U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker about “Thieu’s sudden intransigence.” Walt Rostow said “the diplomatic information previously received plus the information from New York took on new and serious significance.”

That same day, Johnson “instructed Bromley Smith, Executive Secretary of the National Security Council, to get in touch with the Deputy Director of the FBI, Deke DeLoach, and arrange that contacts by Americans with the South Vietnamese Embassy in Washington be monitored,” Rostow wrote.

The White House soon learned that Anna Chennault, the fiercely anticommunist Chinese-born widow of Lt. Gen. Claire Chennault and a member of Nixon's campaign team, was holding curious meetings with South Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States Bui Diem. On October 30, an FBI intercept overheard Bui Diem telling Mrs. Chennault that something "is cooking" and asking her to come by the embassy.[\[22\]](#)

On October 31, at 4:09 p.m., Johnson – his voice thick from a cold – began working the phones, trying to counteract Nixon's chicanery. The Democratic president called Republican Senate Leader Everett Dirksen and broached a concern about Nixon's interference with the peace talks. Johnson said he considered Nixon's behavior a betrayal because he had kept Nixon abreast of the progress, according to an audio recording of the conversation released by the LBJ Library in late 2008.[\[23\]](#)

"I played it clean," Johnson said. "I told Nixon every bit as much, if not more, as Humphrey knows. I've given Humphrey not one thing." Johnson added, "I really think it's a little dirty pool for Dick's people to be messing with the South Vietnamese ambassador and carrying messages around to both of them [North and South Vietnam]. And I don't think people would approve of it if it were known."

Dirksen: "Yeah."

Referring to his political trouble with fellow Democrats as well as rival Republicans, Johnson continued, "While they criticized my conduct of the war, they have never told the enemy that he'd get a better deal, but these last few days, Dick is just gotten a little shaky and he's pissing on the fire a little." Johnson told Dirksen,

"We have a transcript where one of his partners says he's going to frustrate the President by telling the South Vietnamese that, 'just wait a few more days,' ... he can make a better peace for them, and by telling Hanoi that he didn't run this war and didn't get them into it, that he can be a lot more considerate of them than I can because I'm pretty inflexible. I've called them sons of bitches."

Dirksen responded by expressing the Republican concern that Johnson might spring a breakthrough on the peace talks right before the election. "The fellas on our side get antsy-pantsy about it," the Illinois Republican said. "They wonder what the impact would be if a cease-fire or a halt to the bombing will be proclaimed at any given hour, what its impact would be on the results next Tuesday," Election Day.

Johnson denied he would play politics with the war and recalled Nixon's pledges to support his handling of the war. Johnson said, "With Nixon saying 'I want the war stopped, that I'm supporting Johnson, that I want him to get peace if he can, that I'm not going to pull the rug out [from under] him,' I don't know how it could be helped unless he goes to parting under the covers and gets his hand under somebody's dress."

Knowing Dirksen would report back to Nixon, Johnson also cited a few details to give his complaint more credibility. "He better keep Mrs. Chennault and all this crowd tied up for a few days," Johnson said.

That night, Johnson announced a bombing halt of North Vietnam, a key step toward advancing the peace process. The North Vietnamese government was onboard for a negotiated peace.

The next morning at 11:38, Johnson discussed the state of play with Senator Richard Russell, D-Georgia, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Johnson again mentioned Nixon's secret maneuverings though expressing hope that his warning to Dirksen had worked. Nixon has "had these people engaged in this stuff," said Johnson, amid loud honking to clear his sinuses.[\[24\]](#)

"Folks messing around with both sides. ... Hanoi thought they could benefit by waiting and South Vietnam's now beginning to think they could benefit by waiting, by what people are doing. So he [Nixon] knows that I know what he's doing. And this morning they're kind of closing up some of their agents, not so active. I noticed that one of the embassies refused to answer their call."

However, on November 2, Johnson learned that his protests had not shut down the operation. The FBI intercepted the most incriminating evidence yet of Nixon's interference when Anna Chennault contacted Ambassador Bui Diem to convey "a message from her boss (not further identified)," according to an FBI cable.[\[25\]](#)

According to the intercept, Chennault said "her boss wanted her to give [the message] personally to the ambassador. She said the message was that the ambassador is to 'hold on, we are going to win' and that her boss also said, 'hold on, he understands all of it.' She repeated that this is the

only message ... 'he said please tell your boss to hold on.' She advised that her boss had just called from New Mexico."

In quickly relaying the message to Johnson at his ranch in Texas, Rostow noted that the reference to New Mexico "may indicate [Republican vice presidential nominee Spiro] Agnew is acting," since he had taken a campaign swing through the state.

That same day, Thieu recanted on his tentative agreement to meet with the Viet Cong in Paris, pushing the incipient peace talks toward failure. That night, at 9:18, an angry Johnson from his ranch in Texas telephoned Dirksen again, to provide more details about Nixon's activities and to urge Dirksen to intervene more forcefully.[\[26\]](#)

"The agent [Chennault] says she's just talked to the boss in New Mexico and that he said that you must hold out, just hold on until after the election," Johnson said. "We know what Thieu is saying to them out there. We're pretty well informed at both ends." Johnson then renewed his thinly veiled threat to go public. "I don't want to get this in the campaign," Johnson said, adding: "They oughtn't be doing this. This is treason."

Dirksen responded, "I know."

Johnson continued: "I think it would shock America if a principal candidate was playing with a source like this on a matter of this importance. I don't want to do that [go public]. They ought to know that we know what they're doing. I know who they're talking to. I know what they're saying."

The President also stressed the stakes involved, noting that the movement toward negotiations in Paris had contributed to a lull in the violence. "We've had 24 hours of relative peace," Johnson said. "If Nixon keeps the South Vietnamese away from the [peace] conference, well, that's going to be his responsibility. Up to this point, that's why they're not there. I had them signed onboard until this happened."

Dirksen: "I better get in touch with him, I think."

"They're contacting a foreign power in the middle of a war," Johnson said. "It's a damn bad mistake. And I don't want to say so. ... You just tell them that their people are messing around in this thing, and if they don't want it on the front pages, they better quit it."

After hearing from Dirksen, Nixon grew concerned that Johnson might just go public with his evidence of the conspiracy. Nixon discussed his worries with Sen. George Smathers, a conservative Democrat from Florida,

who, in turn, called Johnson on the morning of November 3, just two days before the election.

Smathers recounted that “Nixon said he understands the President is ready to blast him for allegedly collaborating with [Texas Senator John] Tower and [Anna] Chennault to slow the peace talks,” according to a White House summary of the Smathers call to Johnson. “Nixon says there is not any truth at all in this allegation. Nixon says there has been no contact at all. ... Nixon told Smathers he hoped the President would not make such a charge.”[\[27\]](#)

At 1:54 p.m., trying to head off that possibility, Nixon spoke directly to Johnson, according to an audiotape released by the LBJ Library.[\[28\]](#)

“Mr. President, this is Dick Nixon.”

Johnson: “Yes, Dick.”

Nixon: “I just wanted you to know that I got a report from Everett Dirksen with regard to your call. ... I just went on ‘Meet the Press’ and I said ... that I had given you my personal assurance that I would do everything possible to cooperate both before the election and, if elected, after the election and if you felt ... that anything would be useful that I could do, that I would do it, that I felt Saigon should come to the conference table. ...

“I feel very, very strongly about this. Any rumblings around about somebody trying to sabotage the Saigon government’s attitude, there’s absolutely no credibility as far as I’m concerned.”

Armed with the FBI reports and other intelligence, Johnson responded, “I’m very happy to hear that, Dick, because that is taking place. Here’s the history of it. I didn’t want to call you but I wanted you to know what happened.” Johnson recounted some of the chronology leading up to October 28 when it appeared that South Vietnam was onboard for the peace talks. He added: “Then the traffic goes out that Nixon will do better by you. Now that goes to Thieu. I didn’t say with your knowledge. I hope it wasn’t.”

“Huh, no,” Nixon responded. “My God, I would never do anything to encourage ... Saigon not to come to the table. ... Good God, we want them over to Paris, we got to get them to Paris or you can’t have a peace.”

Nixon also insisted that he would do whatever President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk wanted, including going to Paris himself if that would help. “I’m not trying to interfere with your conduct of it; I’ll

only do what you and Rusk want me to do,” Nixon said, recognizing how tantalizingly close Johnson was to a peace deal.

“We’ve got to get this goddamn war off the plate,” Nixon added. “The war apparently now is about where it could be brought to an end. The quicker the better. To hell with the political credit, believe me.”

Johnson, however, sounded less than convinced. “You just see that your people don’t tell the South Vietnamese that they’re going to get a better deal out of the United States government than a conference,” the President said.

Still professing his innocence, Nixon told Johnson, “The main thing that we want to have is a good, strong personal understanding. After all, I trust you on this and I’ve told everybody that.”

“You just see that your people that are talking to these folks make clear your position,” Johnson said.

Nixon protested that some of his Democratic rivals were citing the bombing halt as good news for Humphrey’s campaign. “Some of Humphrey’s people have been gleeful,” Nixon said. “They said the bombing pause is going to help them and our people say it hurts.”

“I’ll tell you what I say,” Johnson cut in. “I say it doesn’t affect the election one way or the other. ... I don’t think it will change one vote.”

Trying to end the conversation on a pleasant note, Nixon inserted, “Anyway, we’ll have fun.”

According to some reports, Nixon and his team were gleeful themselves after the conversation ended, believing they had tamped down Johnson’s suspicions.^[29] However, privately, Johnson didn’t believe Nixon’s protestations of innocence.

In a 2:18 p.m. phone conversation with Secretary of State Rusk about the messages from the Nixon camp to the South Vietnamese leadership, Johnson said, “I don’t think they say these things without his knowledge.”

Rusk: “Well, certainly not without Agnew’s knowledge, ... some cutouts somewhere.”

Johnson: “Well, what do we do now? Just say nothing?”

Rusk: “I would think we ought to hunker down and say nothing at this point.”^[30]

However, on November 4, the White House received another report from the FBI that Anna Chennault had visited the South Vietnamese embassy.

Halfway around the world, South Vietnamese officials apparently were less circumspect than their American counterparts about keeping the secret. Word was already leaking out about the contacts between Nixon's entourage and President Thieu's government.

In late October 1968, Beverly Deepe, a 33-year-old Saigon correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, began to pick up hints from her South Vietnamese sources about the behind-the-scenes plot to sink the peace talks.

History was at one of those forks in the road. A peace agreement could have brought the divisive Vietnam War to an end before the social fabric of the United States was thoroughly torn apart. Besides the lives and treasure that could have been saved, decades of political recriminations could have been averted.

The possible election of Vice President Hubert Humphrey could have given LBJ's Great Society a chance to succeed, alleviating the nation's poverty and reducing racial tensions. Johnson himself might have been viewed quite differently, recognized more as the President who enacted landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act and Medicare, rather than the leader forever stained by the catastrophe of the Vietnam War and the divisions that it created at home. Also, the course of the Republican Party and modern American politics might have been very different. The darkly paranoid Nixon might not have had the chance to infuse the GOP with his win-at-all-cost ethos.

Thus, much was at stake on October 28, 1968, when Deepe cabled her source information to her *Christian Science Monitor* editors with the request that they have the Washington bureau "check out a report that [South Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States] Bui Diem had sent a cable to the Foreign Ministry about contact with the Nixon camp," she told me in a 2012 e-mail.

But she heard nothing back from her *Monitor* editors, even after the South Vietnamese government surprisingly backed out of attending planned peace talks in Paris. Finally, on November 4 in Saigon (and November 3 in Washington), she fashioned her information into an article and submitted it for publication. Her draft began:

“Purported political encouragement from the Richard Nixon camp was a significant factor in the last-minute decision of President [Nguyen van] Thieu’s refusal to send a delegation to the Paris peace talks – at least until the American Presidential election is over.”

The FBI bugging of the South Vietnamese embassy soon clued President Johnson in to the fact that the *Christian Science Monitor*’s Washington bureau was finally checking out Deepe’s story. The FBI picked up a conversation involving journalist Saville Davis of the *Monitor*’s Washington bureau, seeking a comment from Ambassador Bui Diem about “a story received from a [*Monitor*] correspondent in Saigon.” Rostow relayed the FBI report to Johnson who was still at his Texas ranch.[\[31\]](#)

The “eyes only” cable reported: “Davis said that the dispatch from Saigon contains the elements of a major scandal which also involves the Vietnamese ambassador and which will affect presidential candidate Richard Nixon if the *Monitor* publishes it. Time is of the essence inasmuch as Davis has a deadline to meet if he publishes it. He speculated that should the story be published, it will create a great deal of excitement.”

Davis also approached the White House for comment about Deepe’s draft article.[\[32\]](#) The *Monitor*’s inquiry gave President Johnson one more chance to bring to light the Nixon campaign’s gambit before Election Day, albeit only on the day before and possibly not until the morning of the election when the *Monitor* could publish the story.

So, Johnson consulted with Walt Rostow, Rusk and Defense Secretary Clark Clifford in a November 4 conference call.[\[33\]](#) Those three pillars of the Washington Establishment were unanimous in advising Johnson against going public, mostly out of fear that the scandalous information might reflect badly on the U.S. government.

“Some elements of the story are so shocking in their nature that I’m wondering whether it would be good for the country to disclose the story and then possibly have a certain individual [Nixon] elected,” Clifford said. “It could cast his whole administration under such doubt that I think it would be inimical to our country’s interests.”

Though sounding reluctant to go along, Johnson concurred with the judgment. An administration spokesman told Davis, “Obviously I’m not going to get into this kind of thing in any way, shape or form,” according to another “eyes only” cable that Rostow sent Johnson.[\[34\]](#)

The cable added: “Saville Davis volunteered that his newspaper would certainly not print the story in the form in which it was filed; but they might print a story which said Thieu, on his own, decided to hold out until after the election. Incidentally, the story as filed is stated to be based on Vietnamese sources, and not U.S., in Saigon.”

Rostow’s cable also summed up the consensus from him, Rusk and Clifford: “The information sources [an apparent reference to the FBI wiretaps] must be protected and not introduced into domestic politics; even with these sources, the case is not open and shut. On the question of the ‘public’s right to know,’ Sec. Rusk was very strong on the following position: We get information like this every day, some of it very damaging to American political figures. We have always taken the view that with respect to such sources there is no public ‘right to know.’ Such information is collected simply for the purposes of national security.

“So far as the information based on such sources is concerned, all three of us agreed: (A) Even if the story breaks, it was judged too late to have a significant impact on the election. (B) The viability of the man elected as president was involved as well as subsequent relations between him and President Johnson. (C) Therefore, the common recommendation was that we should not encourage such stories and hold tight the data we have.”

Back in Saigon, Deepe was busy at work writing another story, “a play-by-play of the miscommunications between Thieu + top Vietnamese and U.S. Ambassador Bunker and U.S. envoys,” she told me in the e-mail. As for her erstwhile scoop about the Nixon campaign sabotaging the peace talks, “I didn’t have time to think much about it because on Nov. 5 I began filing the detailed play-by-play of the miscommunication between U.S. and Vietnamese leaders in Saigon.”

Deepe (who now uses her married name Keever) recalled that “The *Monitor* deleted those references [to collaboration between the Nixon team and the Saigon government] and picked up much of the rest of my article” for stories that were published. The editors told “me that my lead had been ‘trimmed and softened’ because the editors could get no confirmation and thus without it, they could not print such sweeping charges before the election,” Deepe said in the e-mail.

But Deepe had no idea how high up her story had gone and how close it had come to changing history. What happened to Deepe’s scoop remained a mystery to her for more than 43 years – until I published a story at

Consortiumnews.com on March 3, 2012,[\[35\]](#) after reviewing tapes of previously secret White House phone calls and accessing Rostow's "The 'X' Envelope." I subsequently tracked down Deepe, who was living in Hawaii, and sent her the article.

On November 5, 1968, the American people went to the polls not knowing about Nixon's sabotage of the peace talks. Many voters assumed Johnson's last-ditch peace initiative had simply collapsed on its own or maybe was a political ploy to help Democrat Hubert Humphrey. Some thought that Nixon might be able to succeed where Johnson had failed.

According to a "memorandum for the record," presumably written by Walt Rostow, "our contact with the man in New York" reported on Election Day, November 5, that Nixon remained nervous about the election's outcome and thus reneged on his latest commitment to Johnson not to exploit the peace-talk stalemate for political gain.

"On the question of the problem with Saigon, he [Nixon] did not stay with the statesman-like role but pressed publicly the failure of Saigon to come along as an anti-Democrat political issue," the memo said.[\[36\]](#) So, even as Johnson refused to exploit evidence of Nixon's "treason," Nixon played hardball until the last vote was cast.

That night, as the ballots were tallied, Nixon narrowly prevailed over Humphrey by about 500,000 votes or less than one percent of the ballots cast.

On the day after the election, Rostow relayed to Johnson another FBI intercept which had recorded South Vietnamese Ambassador Bui Diem saying, prior to the American balloting, that he was "keeping his fingers crossed" in hopes of a Nixon victory.[\[37\]](#)

On November 7, Rostow passed along another report to Johnson about the thinking of South Vietnam's leaders, with a cover letter that read: "If you wish to get the story raw, read the last paragraph, marked."[\[38\]](#) That marked paragraph quoted Major Bui Cong Minh, assistant military attaché at the South Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, saying about the peace talks: "Major Minh expressed the opinion that the move by Saigon was to help presidential candidate Nixon, and that had Saigon gone to the

conference table, presidential candidate Humphrey would probably have won.”[39]

The White House also learned that Anna Chennault remained in contact with Ambassador Bui Diem, including a cryptic conversation on November 7, in which she told him she had conveyed a message from President Thieu to “them,” presumably a reference to the Nixon team. The cable read: “She advised she had given ‘them’ everything when she finally got back to her office to call, that ‘they’ got the whole message. ...

“Chennault continued that ‘they’ are still planning things but are not letting people know too much because they want to be careful to avoid embarrassing ‘you’, themselves, or the present U.S. government. Therefore, whatever we do must be carefully planned. ... Chennault added that Senator John Goodwin Tower had talked to her today. ... and Chennault and Tower plan to meet [Ambassador] Diem ‘either Monday.’”[40]

After reading the cable on the morning of November 8, Rostow wrote to Johnson, “First reactions may well be wrong. But with this information I think it’s time to blow the whistle on these folks.” Of course, as the president-elect, Nixon was now in the driver’s seat and there wasn’t anything Johnson could do to change that.[41]

Another report on November 8 described a breakfast meeting between Ambassador Bui Diem and “a reliable and trustworthy American,” who discussed President Thieu’s revised approach to the Paris talks which “gave the GVN [South Vietnam] a more prominent status than the NLF [Viet Cong] ... and put negotiations on a Vietnamese-to-Vietnamese basis rather than a U.S.-to-Vietnamese basis. ... Asked if he [Bui Diem] thought there was much chance of Hanoi’s acceptance, he replied ‘no,’ but he added that it put the GVN on the offensive rather than in the position of appearing to scuttle negotiations.”

In other words, the South Vietnamese government was making a public relations move to ensure the talks would fail but without Thieu getting the blame. Bui Diem also expressed satisfaction that the U.S. elections had ousted key anti-war senators, Wayne Morse, Ernest Gruening and Joseph Clark.[42]

The report on Bui Diem’s thoughts upset Johnson, but he chose to continue trying to persuade Nixon to live up to his pre-election commitment to do whatever he could to push the peace process toward success. At 2:54

p.m. on November 8, Johnson spoke again with Sen. Dirksen to stress the urgency of Nixon getting Thieu to reverse his position on the peace talks.

“Hell, no, this ought to go right now,” Johnson declared. “If they [the South Vietnamese] don’t go in there this week, we’re just going to have all kinds of problems. ... We want Thieu to get a message so he can get a delegation from Saigon to Paris next week. We think we’ve held up each day, we’re killing men. We’re killing men. ... Saigon now thinks that they will play this out and keep this thing going on until January the 20 [Inauguration Day] and we think that’s a mistake.”[\[43\]](#)

That evening at 9:23, Nixon called Johnson from Key Biscayne, Florida, where Nixon was taking a vacation after the grueling election. Nixon sounded confident and relaxed, even as Johnson continued to push regarding the peace talks. Johnson recounted the evidence of the continued interference by Nixon’s emissaries and even described the Republican motivation for disrupting the talks, speaking of himself in the third person.

“Johnson was going to have a bombing pause to try to elect Humphrey; they [the South Vietnamese] ought to hold out because Nixon will not sell you out like the Democrats sold out China,” Johnson said. “I think they’ve been talking to [Vice President-elect Spiro] Agnew,” Johnson continued. “They’ve been quoting you [Nixon] indirectly, that the thing they ought to do is to just not show up at any [peace] conference and wait until you come into office.

“Now they’ve started that [boycott] and that’s bad. They’re killing Americans every day. I have that [story of the peace-talk sabotage] documented. There’s not any question but that’s happening. ... That’s the story, Dick, and it’s a sordid story. ... I don’t want to say that to the country, because that’s not good.”

Faced with Johnson’s threat, Nixon promised to tell the South Vietnamese officials to reverse themselves and join the peace talks. However, nothing much changed.[\[44\]](#)

At a November 11 dinner party, President Thieu discussed what he termed a U.S. “betrayal” of him when he was getting pressured regarding the Paris peace talks, according to a “secret” U.S. government report on Thieu’s comments. The report added, “Thieu told his guests that during the U.S. election campaign he had sent two secret emissaries to the U.S. to contact Richard Nixon.”[\[45\]](#)

On November 13, South Vietnam's Minister of Information Ton That Thein held a press conference criticizing Johnson and his diplomats for rushing matters on the peace talks. Thein also acknowledged possible pre-election contacts with elements of Nixon's campaign.

A U.S. Embassy cable reported that "Asked whether Nixon had encouraged the GVN [the government of South Vietnam] to delay agreement with the US, Thein replied that, while there may have been contacts between Nixon staffers and personnel of the [South Vietnamese] Embassy in Washington, a person of the caliber of Nixon would not do such a thing."[\[46\]](#)

On November 15, ten days after the election, suspicions of the peace-talk sabotage began seeping into the U.S. news media. Columnist Georgie Anne Geyer reported, "Top Saigon officials are boasting privately they helped assure the election of Richard M. Nixon. They are pleased about it. 'We did it,' one of them said. 'We helped elect an American President.'" [\[47\]](#)

Columnists Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson noted in a November 17 column that Johnson "learned that Saigon's Ambassador Bui Diem had been in touch secretly with Richard Nixon's people. There were unconfirmed reports that South Vietnamese leaders had even slipped campaign cash to Nixon representatives."[\[48\]](#)

As the weeks passed and the peace talks remained stalled, Anna Chennault kept up her contacts with South Vietnam's Embassy, briefing a senior diplomat there on December 9, 1968, about Nixon's selection of "her very good friend" Melvin Laird to be Secretary of Defense.[\[49\]](#)

According to the FBI cable, "She went on to say that 'we' should be very happy about this [and] not to be too concerned about the press's references about a coalition government. Chennault indicated that Laird is a very strong man." Rostow forwarded the cable to Johnson on December 10, with the notation, "The Lady is still operational."[\[50\]](#)

After the election, Nixon and his friends in Saigon continued to stall Johnson on his last desperate efforts to bring the war to an end before he left the White House. But Johnson's White House remained tight-lipped about its knowledge of Nixon's treachery.

According to the documents in "The 'X' Envelope," the first detailed press inquiry about the peace-talk sabotage came from *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter Tom Ottenad who contacted Rostow on January 3, 1969,

just 17 days before Johnson would leave office. Ottenad outlined the activities of Anna Chennault on behalf of the campaign and pressed Rostow to confirm that the administration was aware of the subterfuge.

Rostow responded, “I have not one word to say about that matter.”^[51] An FBI intercept also picked up the *Post-Dispatch* questioning Bui Diem about contacts with Chennault. While the ambassador denied any improper contacts with the Nixon administration, Bui Diem acknowledged that Chennault “has visited the Vietnamese embassy from time to time, but not frequently.”^[52]

As published, Ottenad’s article began, “A well-known top official of committees working for the election of Richard M. Nixon secretly got in touch with representatives of South Vietnam shortly before the presidential election. It was in connection with an apparent effort to encourage them to delay in joining the Paris peace talks in hopes of getting a better deal if the Republicans won the White House.” But there was little follow-up to Ottenad’s scoop.^[53]

Despite the bitter frustrations of his foiled peace talks, Johnson kept the secret of Nixon’s sabotage, but – before Nixon’s Inauguration – Johnson did instruct his national security aide Rostow to remove the file containing the evidence.

Chapter Three: The Road Not Taken

Over the past four decades, bits and pieces of evidence have emerged about the secret contacts between Richard Nixon's campaign and the South Vietnamese government, but the accounts never quite overcame the unwillingness of Official Washington to confront the magnitude of what the Nixon campaign had done.

Even in the months after the election, partial accounts surfaced about how Nixon's emissaries had gone behind President Johnson's back and urged Saigon to boycott the peace talks. But there were always denials from Nixon's camp and doubts about the evidence.

Besides the brief newspaper columns and Tom Ottenad's article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a sketchy account appeared in Teddy White's *The Making of a President 1968*, which was published in summer 1969. White's mention of the allegation drew a sharp rejoinder from Anna Chennault, who called the accusations an "insult." The story of high-level intrigue faced a high bar on being accepted as genuine history.

Even in retirement, Walt Rostow remained mum about the Chennault episode, rebuffing another overture from Ottenad on February 11, 1970.^[54] Ottenad also approached ex-President Johnson, but he too chose to hold his tongue, though his legacy had been devastated by his conduct of the Vietnam War – and by his failure to end it.

After Ottenad's inquiry, Johnson's aide Tom Johnson offered a heads-up to Nixon's chief of staff "Bob" Haldeman about another possible story on this touchy topic. To a somewhat baffled Haldeman, Tom Johnson volunteered that ex-President Johnson had given no authorization to anyone to discuss the matter.^[55]

"Haldeman said he was most appreciative that we had advised him of this information and would keep the telephone call completely confidential," Tom Johnson's memo to ex-President Johnson read. "Haldeman seemed genuinely pleased and surprised that we would call on such a matter and expressed his thanks again for the attitude we have been taking toward President Nixon."^[±]

From the start of Nixon's presidency in 1969, the U.S. participation in the Vietnam War continued for more than four years at horrendous cost to both the United States and the people of Vietnam. Having allegedly made his secret commitment to the South Vietnamese regime, Nixon kept searching for violent new ways to get Thieu a better deal than Johnson would have offered. Seeking what he called "peace with honor," Nixon invaded Cambodia, stepped up the bombing of North Vietnam and mined Haiphong Harbor.

In those four years, the war bitterly divided the United States, as anti-war protests grew in size and militancy; parents turned against their children and children against their parents; "hard-hats" attacked "hippies"; Nixon baited one group of angry protesters with his "V" for victory sign and called other protesters "bums"; four students were gunned down at Kent State University in Ohio. But it seemed nothing could stop the war, not massive protests, not even disclosures about the deception that had gotten the United States into the conflict.

In 1971, former Defense Department official Daniel Ellsberg leaked the "Pentagon Papers," a secret history of the war from 1945 to 1967, but the conflict still ground on. Nixon struck back at Ellsberg by having a White House "plumbers unit" break into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. The "plumbers," including ex-CIA operatives, later turned their attention onto Nixon's political rivals, burglarizing the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate building in search of intelligence, including inside information on what the Democrats were up to and what dirt the Democrats might have on Nixon.

Before U.S. participation in the Vietnam War was finally brought to a close in 1973 — on terms similar to what had been available to President Johnson in 1968 — a million more Vietnamese were estimated to have died. Those four years also cost the lives of an additional 20,763 U.S. soldiers, with 111,230 wounded. For the Americans, the war finally came to an end, but it continued for the Vietnamese.

Less than three years after Nixon's peace agreement, the South Vietnamese government fell to North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces. The violence also spread into Cambodia with more disastrous consequences. The Khmer Rouge, after suffering under U.S. bombing attacks for years, seized power and applied a particularly ruthless brand of communism. Millions more perished.

Republicans have long bristled at allegations that Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign helped sink Vietnam peace talks to win the election, but Nixon's Asian counterparts – both in Saigon and Washington – were much more open about the collaboration, what President Lyndon Johnson privately called “treason.” Journalists also added some details from their own research.

In her own 1980 autobiography, *The Education of Anna*, Chennault finally acknowledged that she had been the courier between the Nixon campaign and the South Vietnamese government. She quoted senior Nixon aide John Mitchell as calling her a few days before the 1968 election and telling her: “I’m speaking on behalf of Mr. Nixon. It’s very important that our Vietnamese friends understand our Republican position and I hope you made that clear to them.”

Journalist Seymour Hersh described the Chennault initiative sketchily in his 1983 biography of Henry Kissinger, *The Price of Power*. Hersh reported that U.S. intelligence “agencies had caught on that Chennault was the go-between between Nixon and his people and President Thieu in Saigon,” Hersh wrote. “The idea was to bring things to a stop in Paris and prevent any show of progress.”

According to Hersh, Nixon's informal intelligence operation also benefited from inside information from Henry Kissinger, a foreign policy aide to the Rockefeller family and an informal adviser to the Vietnam negotiations. Hersh reported that Kissinger back-channelled inside information to the Nixon campaign regarding Johnson's progress.

When Hersh's book was published, Kissinger denounced it but didn't specifically deny the portion about tipping off the Nixon campaign to peace-talk developments. Though the value of Kissinger's information may not have been as great as Hersh's book suggested – since the Johnson administration was providing formal briefings to both Nixon and Humphrey – Kissinger's subterfuge did appear to impress Nixon enough to earn Kissinger a spot as the new President's national security adviser.

Perhaps the most complete account from the South Vietnamese side was *The Palace File* by Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schecter, which was published in 1986. In the book, Hung, an adviser to South Vietnam's

President Nguyen van Thieu, recounted detailed conversations with his boss. The book also contains interviews with Anna Chennault. Both Thieu and Chennault described messages from Nixon's campaign urging the South Vietnamese to boycott Johnson's peace talks in the crucial days before the November 5, 1968, election.

Upset by LBJ's efforts to negotiate an end to the war with North Vietnam, Thieu followed the Republican advice and – just days before the election – balked at the Paris peace talks, thus denying Humphrey a last-minute boost, Hung/Schechter wrote. The authors added that Thieu believed that Nixon owed him a political debt as a result of his refusal to support Johnson's peace initiative just before the U.S. 1968 election.

“Although he never said so publicly, Thieu was certain that his refusal to take part in the peace talks with the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong when President Johnson halted the bombing of North Vietnam on October 31, 1968, just five days before the election, played a decisive role in Nixon's victory.”

Hung said that after he became a special assistant to Thieu in 1973, they discussed these events over many hours. Thieu described his arrangement with the Republicans as one of mutual benefit, since he believed “a Humphrey victory would mean a coalition government in six months” but “with Nixon at least there was a chance.”

According to *The Palace File*, “Anna Chennault visited Saigon frequently in 1968 to advise Thieu on Nixon's candidacy and his views on Vietnam. She told [Thieu] then that Nixon would be a stronger supporter of Vietnam than Humphrey.”

Thieu also bypassed his Washington embassy for some of his messages to Chennault, Hung/Schechter wrote. “He relied heavily on his brother Nguyen Van Kieu” and that “Mrs. Chennault often sent messages to Thieu through aides to his brother.” Based on interviews with Chennault, Hung/Schechter reported that she claimed that Nixon's campaign director John Mitchell called her “almost every day” urging her to stop Thieu from going to the Paris peace talks and warning her that she should use pay phones to avoid wiretaps.

Hung/Schechter wrote: “Mitchell's message to her was always the same: ‘Don't let him go.’ A few days before the election, Mitchell telephoned her with a message for President Thieu, ‘Anna, I'm speaking on behalf of Mr. Nixon. It's very important that our Vietnamese friends

understand our Republican position and I hope you have made that clear to them.’”

Chennault said, “Thieu was under heavy pressure from the Democrats. My job was to hold him back and prevent him from changing his mind.”

Thus, Nixon’s trump card in the election was knowing that Johnson’s efforts to achieve a breakthrough before November 5 would be countered by President Thieu’s intransigence, privately encouraged by the Republicans. That allowed Nixon to present himself to the American voters as someone who was willing to do whatever Johnson wanted in the cause of peace while realizing that nothing would actually happen.

As Hung/Schechter wrote: “Throughout October 1968 Thieu tried to delay the Johnson bombing halt decision and an announcement of Paris Talks as long as possible to buy time for Nixon.”

Another key figure in the 1968 drama was South Vietnam’s Ambassador to the United States Bui Diem, who addressed the sabotage allegations in his own memoir, *In the Jaws of History*, published in 1987. Bui Diem acknowledged many of the facts about his meetings with Republicans and his infamous cable to Saigon conveying the desire of “many Republican friends” that Thieu “stand firm” against Johnson’s pressure. But Bui Diem insisted there was nothing wrong in these contacts and communications.

Despite his claims of innocence, Bui Diem’s admissions lend important factual support to the case against Nixon. For instance, Bui Diem recounted a private meeting with Nixon at the Hotel Pierre in New York City on July 12, 1968. It was attended by Nixon’s campaign manager John Mitchell and Anna Chennault. At the end of the meeting, “Nixon thanked me for my visit and added that his staff would be in touch with me through John Mitchell and Anna Chennault,” Bui Diem wrote.

According to Chennault’s account of the same meeting, Nixon also told Bui Diem that as President he would make Vietnam his top priority and “see that Vietnam gets better treatment from me than under the Democrats.”[\[56\]](#)

After the meeting with Nixon, Bui Diem said he grew more alienated from President Johnson and the Democrats as they pressed for peace talks to end the war. By then, more than 30,000 American troops had died and the conflict was ripping the United States apart.

“As the Democrats steered with all due haste away from the Indochinese involvement they had engineered, I was increasingly attracted to the Republican side,” Bui Diem wrote. “As far as courting Republicans went, there were few places in Washington like Anna Chennault’s penthouse apartment at the Watergate. ... By October [1968] I was back in touch with Anna, who was now co-chairman of Nixon’s fundraising committee, and Senator John Tower, chairman of the Republican Key Issues Committee. I also got together with George [H.W.] Bush and other Republicans from whom I was trying to elicit support for a strong Vietnam policy.”

Bui Diem’s reference to Bush may seem odd, since Bush at the time was only a freshman congressman from Texas. However, Bush, the son of former Sen. Prescott Bush and the scion of a well-connected Wall Street family, was already emerging as an important behind-the-scenes player in Washington. Despite his back-bench status in Congress and his relative youth – then 44 – Bush made Nixon’s short list for vice president before Nixon picked Spiro Agnew.

Nixon then recruited Bush to be a leading surrogate for the 1968 campaign. In subsequent years, Bush would remain a Nixon favorite, getting financial support from a Nixon slush fund to run for the U.S. Senate in 1970 and, after losing, getting appointments as United Nations ambassador and as Republican National Committee chairman in 1973, when he spearheaded efforts to contain the Watergate scandal.

But Bui Diem’s linking Bush to the Republican/Saigon collaboration in fall 1968 is provocative. Bush was later implicated in a similar scheme in 1980 when he was Ronald Reagan’s running mate and allegedly took part in secret Republican efforts to sabotage President Jimmy Carter’s talks with Iran to free 52 American hostages.[\[57\]](#)

In fall 1968, as the U.S. election neared, Bui Diem said he was surprised that discovery of his covert contacts with Republicans angered the Johnson administration. In his memoir, he also claimed to be perplexed to receive an inquiry from the *Christian Science Monitor*, just before the election, about those contacts and his alleged interference with peace talks.

Bui Diem said he rebuffed the *Monitor*’s questions, but then went back to examine his recent cables to Saigon. He noted that there were a couple of messages that might have understandably raised suspicions about his role in Republican efforts to disrupt Johnson’s peace initiative.

“I found a cable from October 23 ... in which I had said, ‘Many Republican friends have contacted me and encouraged us to stand firm. They were alarmed by press reports to the effect that you [President Thieu] had already softened your position.’ In another cable, from October 27, I wrote, ‘I am regularly in touch with the Nixon entourage,’ by which I meant Anna Chennault, John Mitchell, and Senator Tower.”

Bui Diem said those were the only two relevant cables, adding: “They certainly did not mean that I had arranged a deal with the Republicans. But putting the two together and looking at them in the context of the charged pre-election atmosphere, I saw that they constituted circumstantial evidence for anybody ready to assume the worst.” He also conceded that Chennault “had other avenues to Thieu, primarily through his brother, Nguyen Van Kieu, a South Vietnamese ambassador to Taiwan.”

In 2002, former South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky referenced the Republican initiative in his memoir, *Buddha's Child*. Ky wrote that Chennault “told us that Nixon was far more anticommunist than Humphrey and that if he was elected he would make sure that U.S. aid continued until the war was won. But, Madame Chennault explained, first he needed *our* help. We could help by not going to the Paris peace conference until *after* the election. If we refused to participate in negotiations, she explained, Nixon would be able to condemn the Democratic Party and Humphrey as weaklings. There would be no light at the end of the tunnel, no hope for a quick peace.”[\[58\]](#)

Indeed, after Humphrey’s defeat, the war was extended. When President Nixon met Thieu on Midway Island on June 8, 1969, in their first face-to-face sit-down after the election, Nixon unveiled his plan for a gradual “Vietnamization” of the war, according to *The Palace File*. Hung/Schechter described Thieu explaining Nixon’s assurances in a later meeting that Thieu had with Taiwan’s leader Chiang Kai-shek.

“He promised me eight years of strong support,” Thieu told Chiang. “Four years of military support during his first term in office and four years of economic support during his second term. ... By the time most of the Americans have withdrawn, so will the North Vietnamese; by then Saigon should be strong enough to carry on its own defense with only material support from the United States.”

Nixon’s secret plan of four more years of war and four additional years of military support represented what Nixon called “peace with honor.”

In 1968, Sam Brown, like many of his youthful contemporaries, was disgusted by the Vietnam War. So, he poured his energy into Eugene McCarthy's anti-war campaign for the Democratic nomination, serving as McCarthy's Youth Coordinator, challenging the incumbent Democratic President Lyndon Johnson.

After McCarthy achieved a surprisingly strong showing in the New Hampshire primary, Johnson made a surprise announcement on March 31 that he would not seek reelection and instead devote his energies to ending the Vietnam War. Then came the catastrophes of 1968 – the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., the race riots that followed and Sen. Robert Kennedy's murder.

The alienation of young anti-war activists deepened further when McCarthy lost to Hubert Humphrey at the tumultuous Chicago convention as police clubbed protesters in the streets. At that point, the 25-year-old Brown – like many other disillusioned young Americans – faced a tough choice: whether to sit out the general election in protest of Humphrey's support for President Lyndon Johnson's war policies or accept Humphrey as superior to his Republican rival, Richard Nixon.

I contacted Brown in 2012 about that old dilemma in the context of my reporting about Johnson's desperate bid to negotiate an end to the Vietnam War in the fall of 1968 and the now-declassified evidence that Nixon's campaign sabotaged those efforts through back-channel contacts that encouraged the South Vietnamese government to boycott Johnson's peace talks. In other words, if Humphrey had won, the chances were that Johnson could have secured a peace deal and brought the war to an end much earlier than Nixon did.

Of course, in 1968, Brown was unaware of what Johnson privately called Nixon's "treason," in part, because Johnson chose to keep the evidence secret, rather than risk releasing it before the election only to have Nixon still win and start off with a deeply marred presidency. Brown's 1968 dilemma also has recurred periodically for Democrats as some on the Left prefer to cast votes for third parties or simply not vote to protest some shortcoming of the Democratic nominee – even if the Republican

alternative is likely to pursue more warlike policies and roll back programs aimed at helping the poor and the middle class.

In 1980, many on the Left abandoned Jimmy Carter because of his tacking to the political center, thus clearing the way for Ronald Reagan. In 2000, nearly three million voters cast ballots for Ralph Nader (who dubbed Al Gore “Tweedle-Dum” to George W. Bush’s “Tweedle-Dee”), thus helping Bush get close enough in Florida to steal the White House (with further help from five Republican partisans on the U.S. Supreme Court). In 2012, some on the Left vowed to turn their backs on Barack Obama because he had disappointed them on health-care reform, the Afghan War and other policies.

It seems that on the Left there has been this quadrennial debate over whether one should withhold support from the Democratic nominee to maintain one’s moral purity or hold one’s nose and accept the “lesser evil,” i.e. the major-party candidate who will inflict the least damage on Americans and the world. (By contrast, the Right is more likely to challenge mainstream Republicans in primaries but still tends to turn out for whoever the GOP candidate is in the general election.)

Yet, whatever the disappointments with Carter or Gore or Obama, those concerns paled against the depth of anger on the Left in 1968. After all, after running as the “peace” candidate in 1964, President Johnson sharply escalated the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and Vice President Humphrey stood loyally at his side. Then, some of the brightest hopes for the nation – Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy – were gunned down and protesters were beaten in Chicago.

It was in that maelstrom of tragedy and anger that Sam Brown, like other McCarthy (and Kennedy) supporters had to decide whether to line up behind Humphrey, who was admired for his support for social and economic justice (even as he was condemned for his loyalty to Johnson on the Vietnam War), or to stay on the sidelines and risk Nixon’s victory.

Brown told me that he was on the fence about which way to go, saying his decision depended on Humphrey making a clean break with Johnson on the war. There was a widely held view at the time that Johnson was so psychologically “owned by the war” — and his responsibility for the terrible bloodshed — that he couldn’t take the necessary steps to make peace, Brown said. Humphrey did not want to betray Johnson but understood that his campaign depended on his reuniting the shattered

Democratic Party. So, Humphrey sent emissaries to approach Brown and other anti-war activists.

“The campaign in a formal way reached out to those who had supported McCarthy,” Brown recalled. The campaign’s emissary to about a dozen activists was Vermont Gov. Philip Hoff, who had “cred” because he was an early opponent of the Vietnam War, Brown said. But Hoff faced a hard sell.

“We were so bitter about Johnson that we weren’t going to listen to Humphrey,” Brown said about himself and some of the other activists. “It can’t be just, ‘he’s a good guy, trust us.’ You had to give us something to believe in. ... There needed to be some lifeline thrown.”

The anti-war activists also thought they might be able to use Humphrey’s outreach to pry him away from his pro-war position. “We had a little leverage now to move Humphrey,” Brown said. “It’s sounds pretentious. I had just turned 25 years old” but simply endorsing him “would have given up all the leverage we had to move Humphrey on the war.” Brown was one of the McCarthy people who ultimately withheld support for Humphrey as the Vice President continued to balk at repudiating the war.

So, as Nixon built up an imposing lead in the presidential race, Brown returned to his home state of Iowa to work for anti-war Senate candidate Harold Hughes. Humphrey waited until September 30 before he gave a speech in Salt Lake City, Utah, calling for a unilateral U.S. bombing halt.

“Humphrey didn’t break with the President [Johnson] until way too late,” Brown said. “It was just too late to turn that ship around.”

However, Humphrey’s speech helped close the gap against Nixon. There also was more happening on a possible peace deal behind the scenes. In October 1968, the North Vietnamese began to show flexibility toward Johnson’s peace overtures and Johnson started pressing the South Vietnamese government to come onboard and join peace talks in Paris.

Even though few Americans knew how close Johnson was to ending the war, Nixon was kept informed and grew alarmed that a breakthrough on peace would put Humphrey over the top, another heartbreaking loss for Nixon. Arguably, Nixon, the master political strategist, also recognized that extending the war would not only ease his route to victory in 1968 but might drive a permanent wedge into the Democrats’ New Deal alliance.

Whether by design or by accident, it did turn out that by dragging out the Vietnam War for four more years, Nixon cleaved the Democratic Party in two, carving away many “hard-hat” white voters from what they saw as “hippie” anti-war activists and their minority allies. The splintering of the Democrats also gave rise to a sophisticated group of war hawks who switched to the Republicans and became known as the neoconservatives.

Reflecting on the consequences of the 1968 election – and after reviewing the latest evidence of Nixon’s Vietnam “treason” – Sam Brown said he regretted his decision to rebuff appeals for his support of Humphrey, especially since he thinks endorsements from former McCarthy activists might have erased Nixon’s narrow victory margin. “In ’68, there was plenty of blame to go around,” Brown said. “You had to forgive us somewhat.”

Still, Brown acknowledged that American democracy could have gone in a much more positive direction if Nixon had been defeated. “What he did to our politics,” Brown lamented. “He was every bit as duplicitous as people said he was, maybe more so.”

On a personal level, Brown said his decision in 1968 still causes him pain and embarrassment. “I’m not proud about what I’m about to tell you,” Brown said, adding that he cast his ballot for a minor third-party candidate as “a throwaway vote.”

Brown said he justified his choice because he was living in Iowa, which was expected to go for Nixon anyway. However, in retrospect, he called his rationalization “a cop-out” and told me, “I wish I had voted for Humphrey even in a place that didn’t count. ... In retrospect, everybody should have been for Humphrey.”

In early 1969, after seven years of covering the war for the *Christian Science Monitor* and other news outlets, Beverly Deepe left Vietnam. She returned to the United States and married U.S. Navy officer Charles Kever. In the late 1970s, she moved to Hawaii and taught at the University of Hawaii. She didn’t think much more about Nixon’s peace talk sabotage until she began working on her memoir, scheduled for publication in 2013. As part of her research, she read several books from insiders about their knowledge of Nixon’s gambit.

“In my memoirs ... I had pieced together much of what happened,” she said in an e-mail to me. “My piecing was based on [former Ambassador] Bui Diem’s book, *In the Jaws of History*; Larry Berman’s *No Peace, No Honor* and *The Palace File* by [Thieu’s adviser Nguyen Tien] Hung and [Jerrold L.] Schecter.”

But Deepe/Keever said she was unaware that her earlier *Monitor* story – the scoop that nearly changed history – had gone directly to President Johnson, not until she read my article at *Consortiumnews.com* about “The X Envelope.”

“This was the news bulletin that I learned from your story based on your investigative reporting and so I really appreciate your digging and writing,” she said. “I had no such idea about my lead being discussed by LBJ and others.”

As for her thoughts about what might have happened if history had taken a different fork in the road – if Johnson had overruled his advisers and confirmed her story – Deepe/Keever wrote: “If Johnson had confirmed my story or the *Monitor* had run it as filed, it’s hard for me to say what the impact would have been on the election. ...

“However, given how narrow Nixon’s margin of victory was, certainly Johnson’s confirmation might have swayed enough votes to be decisive. Hard for me to say without doing my own legwork, but polls I’ve come across indicate that might have been the case. Bui Diem quotes William Safire saying that Thieu made Nixon president. ...

“Tho[ugh] I can’t judge the impact of pre-election news about the Nixon camp’s liaison with Thieu, I think the more interesting question for me is: What would the U.S. and Vietnam be like if Humphrey had won? I think the final outcome would ultimately be the same for Vietnam, with the Communists seizing control of the South, perhaps via a coalition government to permit the U.S. to save face.

“And the war would have been shorter and less bloody without the incursions and bombing in Laos and Cambodia. Far fewer casualties and less cost to the treasuries on all sides.”

That, however, was the road not taken.

Chapter Four: On to Watergate

The failure of Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats to call Richard Nixon out on his possible “treason” over the 1968 Vietnam peace talks left Nixon with a sense of invulnerability, a gambler’s confidence after succeeding at a high-stakes bluff. When it came to his reelection campaign, Nixon pushed more chips onto the table.

Feeling that he had snookered the savvy Johnson, why not hoodwink the entire democratic process by rigging the selection of his Democratic opponent? Why not apply his off-the-books intelligence apparatus – his dirty tricksters – to make sure he was facing the weakest possible Democratic opponent and one left with a bitterly divided party?

But Nixon had worries about his own vulnerabilities, what the Democrats might have on him. For instance, he knew something that few other Americans did, that there was a file somewhere with evidence that he had collaborated to drag out the Vietnam War for political advantage. And those worries were rekindled in June 1971 when the *New York Times* began publishing excerpts from the classified Pentagon Papers, which detailed the deceptions – primarily by Democratic politicians – that had plunged the nation into the Vietnam War.

The Pentagon Papers covered the years 1945 to 1967. But Nixon knew there was a sequel, what Johnson had once described to him as a “sordid story,” the tale of Nixon’s interference in the 1968 peace process for political gain even as a half million U.S. soldiers sat in a war zone – and some 20,000 would return home in body bags over the ensuing four years while tens of thousands more would be wounded and maimed.

Nixon knew there was a classified file somewhere containing the evidence against him and – when the *New York Times* began publishing the Pentagon Papers on June 13, 1971 – Nixon’s mind turned again to locating that file. Given the furor surrounding the Pentagon Papers, what would the reaction have been if the second shoe had dropped, revealing an unnecessary extension of the war from 1968 to 1971 and beyond?

Nixon was determined to find that file, not realizing that an embittered Johnson had ordered his national security aide Walt Rostow to take the file

out of the White House before Nixon arrived on January 20, 1969. Indeed, Nixon apparently had his senior aides searching for the file during much of his first term.

The first transcript in Stanley I. Kutler's *Abuse of Power*, a book of Nixon's recorded White House conversations relating to Watergate, is of an Oval Office conversation in which Nixon orders his subordinates to break into the Brookings Institution because he believes the 1968 file might be in a safe at the centrist Washington think tank.

On June 17, 1971, as the Pentagon Papers dominated the front pages of U.S. newspapers, Nixon pressed National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and White House Chief of Staff H.R. "Bob" Haldeman to renew their efforts to find that missing file. The transcript of the Oval Office conversation revealed that Nixon had been searching for the file for some time and was perturbed by the failure of his staff to find it.

Kutler assumes the reference to the file pertains to a Nixon effort aimed at "embarrassing the Johnson Administration on the [October 1968] bombing halt," but the fuller historical context indicates that Nixon was interested in what the file might show about the broader context of Johnson's last-ditch peace efforts, which included not just the bombing halt but – more importantly – what Johnson had learned from wiretaps and other surveillance directed against Nixon's campaign.

"You can blackmail Johnson on this stuff and it might be worth doing," Haldeman said. "The bombing halt stuff is all in that same file or in some of the same hands."

"Do we have it?" Nixon asked Haldeman. "I've asked for it. You said you didn't have it."

Haldeman responded, "We can't find it."

Kissinger: "We have nothing here, Mr. President."

Nixon: "Well, damnit, I asked for that because I need it."

Kissinger: "But Bob and I have been trying to put the damn thing together."

Haldeman: "We have a basic history in constructing our own, but there is a file on it."

Nixon: "Where?"

Haldeman: "[Presidential aide Tom Charles] Huston swears to God that there's a file on it and it's at Brookings."

Nixon: “Bob? Bob? Now do you remember Huston’s plan [for White House-sponsored break-ins as part of domestic counter-intelligence operations]? Implement it.”

Kissinger: “Now Brookings has no right to have classified documents.”

Nixon: “I want it implemented. ... Goddamnit, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it.”

Haldeman: “They may very well have cleaned them by now, but this thing, you need to –“

Kissinger: “I wouldn’t be surprised if Brookings had the files.”

Haldeman: “My point is Johnson knows that those files are around. He doesn’t know for sure that we don’t have them around.”

On June 30, 1971, Nixon again berated Haldeman about the need to break into Brookings and “take it [the file] out.” Nixon even suggested using former CIA officer E. Howard Hunt (who later oversaw the two Watergate break-ins in May and June of 1972) to conduct the Brookings break-in.

“You talk to Hunt,” Nixon told Haldeman. “I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You’re to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in. ... Just go in and take it. Go in around 8:00 or 9:00 o’clock.”

Haldeman: “Make an inspection of the safe.”

Nixon: “That’s right. You go in to inspect the safe. I mean, *clean it up*.”[\[8\]](#)

What these conversations appear to show is that Nixon’s 1968 peace-talk gambit merged almost seamlessly with what history now defines as the Watergate scandal. The origins of Nixon’s talk about break-ins derived from his frantic pursuit of what could have been his own damaging Pentagon Papers, the inside story of why the Vietnam War continued for four more painful years.

Yet, this connection between the two scandals has been largely overlooked by journalists and scholars. They mostly have downplayed evidence of the Nixon campaign’s derailing of the 1968 peace negotiations – often treating it like a dubious conspiracy theory (despite the wealth of evidence) – while glorifying the news media’s role in uncovering Nixon’s cover-up of his re-election campaign’s spying on Democrats in 1972.

The failure to connect those two dots has contributed to one of the Washington press corps’ most misguided sayings: “the cover-up is worse

than the crime.” As part of the commemoration of the 40 anniversary of Watergate, the *Washington Post*’s star reporters on the scandal – Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward – penned a reflection on the case, making the argument that the Watergate scandal was much worse than they had understood at the time – and that the cover-up was the least of it.

In their first joint byline in 36 years, Woodward and Bernstein wrote that the break-in and cover-up were not just a one-off example of Nixon’s political paranoia. They depicted Watergate as essentially five intersecting “wars” that Nixon was waging against his perceived enemies and the democratic process, taking on the anti-war movement, the news media, the Democrats, justice and history.

“At its most virulent, Watergate was a brazen and daring assault, led by Nixon himself, against the heart of American democracy: the Constitution, our system of free elections, the rule of law,” they wrote in the *Post*’s Outlook section on June 10, 2012. Woodward and Bernstein did take note of the Oval Office discussion on June 17, 1971, regarding Nixon’s eagerness to break into Brookings in search of the elusive file, but they simply referred to the file’s contents as documents about Johnson’s “handling of the 1968 bombing halt in Vietnam.”[\[59\]](#)

What they missed was that the bombing halt had been part of Johnson’s larger effort to achieve a breakthrough with North Vietnam to end the war, an initiative that Nixon’s team torpedoed. But Nixon also knew that Johnson had discovered the sabotage and had assembled a file, which was missing. While it makes no sense that Nixon would be so hyper-sensitive about the file’s contents if he simply wanted to know more about Johnson’s bombing halt, it makes all the sense in the world that Nixon would go to great lengths, including a criminal break-in, to recover a file that could mean his political undoing.

Nixon’s fear was that the Democrats possessed damaging evidence that would have exposed him as something of a traitor, trading the lives of tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers for a political edge in an election, an ugly sequel to the Pentagon Papers, arguably even uglier. Watching the media frenzy about the Pentagon Papers in June 1971, Nixon understood what the likely reaction would be to the sequel. The file was a clear and present danger to Nixon’s second term.

To Nixon, reclaiming the file justified the launch of a project involving illegal break-ins. That did not mean that the Watergate break-ins a year later

were a continuing search for what Walt Rostow called “The ‘X’ Envelope”; only that the origins of Howard Hunt’s “plumbers” traced back to Nixon’s fears that his 1968 gambit would be exposed.

The actual purpose of the Watergate break-ins has remained one of the key mysteries of the scandal. Why did Nixon’s reelection committee take the risk to send burglars into the Democratic National Committee offices? Was the search more offensive or defensive?

Were the burglars trying to find something like the secret file on Nixon’s 1968 “treason” or other evidence that might be sprung on Nixon during the heat of the 1972 campaign? Or was the raid simply seeking some target of opportunity, some new data that might help Nixon insure his reelection, such as guaranteeing that he would end up running against his preferred Democratic opponent, South Dakota Sen. George McGovern.

By spring 1972, Nixon had reason to be relatively optimistic about his reelection prospects, especially since his dirty tricksters – the likes of Donald Segretti – had disrupted the campaigns of the most formidable Democratic opponents, such as Maine Sen. Edmund Muskie.

It appeared likely that Nixon would face McGovern, a hero of the anti-war Left but a non-starter for Big Labor and other key Democratic constituencies. A McGovern candidacy was sure to deepen the chasm already dividing the Democratic Party. But the ever-paranoid Nixon wanted to make sure the Democrats didn’t have something surprising up their sleeves. Thus, he pressured his subordinates for more and more intelligence about his opponents.

On May 28, 1972, anti-communist Cuban-American burglars working for President Nixon’s reelection committee broke in to the Democratic National Committee’s offices at the elegant Watergate complex.

“The horse is in the house,” they reported over a walkie-talkie back to team leaders across Virginia Avenue at a Howard Johnson’s hotel. The leaders of the operation included G. Gordon Liddy, a former FBI agent who had devised the spying plan called Gemstone, and E. Howard Hunt, an ex-CIA officer and part-time spy novel writer. From a balcony at the Howard Johnson’s, James McCord, another former CIA officer and the security

chief for the Committee to Re-elect the President known as CREEP, could see the burglars' pencil flashlights darting around the darkened offices.

McCord, an electronics specialist, made his way over to the Watergate and was let in by one of the Cuban burglars. Upon entering the DNC offices, McCord placed one tap on the phone of a secretary of Democratic National Chairman Larry O'Brien and a second on the phone of R. Spencer Oliver, a 34-year-old Democratic operative who was executive director of the Association of State Democratic Chairmen. While some burglars rifled through DNC files and photographed documents, McCord tested the bugs on the two phones. His little pocket receiver showed that they worked.[\[60\]](#)

The choice of the two phones has never been fully explained. O'Brien's might seem obvious since he was party chairman. Oliver was a well-placed insider in Democratic politics, though little known to the general public. Some *aficionados* of the Watergate mystery have speculated that Oliver's phone was chosen because his father worked with Robert R. Mullen whose Washington-based public relations firm had employed Hunt. The firm also served as a CIA front in the 1960s and early 1970s, and did work for industrialist Howard Hughes, who, in turn, had questionable financial ties to Nixon's brother, Donald.

Because Oliver's father also represented Hughes, one theory held that Nixon's team wanted to know what derogatory information the Democrats might possess about money to Nixon's brother from Hughes, evidence that might be sprung during the fall campaign.

After returning to the Howard Johnson's hotel from the Watergate, the burglary team's satisfaction with their break-in – after two unsuccessful tries – was dampened by the realization that their receivers only could pick up conversations on one of the phones, the tap in Oliver's office. Though upset about the limited information that might flow from that single tap, the Gemstone team began transcribing the mix of personal and professional calls by Oliver and other members of his staff who used his phone when he wasn't there.

One of the Nixon operatives, Alfred Baldwin, said he transcribed about 200 calls, including some dealing with "political strategy." He then sent the transcripts to McCord, who passed them on to Liddy. Summaries then went to Jeb Stuart Magruder, CREEP's deputy chairman who said he passed the material to CREEP's chairman, former Attorney General John

Mitchell, who had left the Justice Department to head up the President's reelection bid.

How useful the Gemstone material was has remained a point of historical dispute. Since the intercepts violated strict federal wiretapping statutes, the contents were never fully disclosed and the recipients of the intercepts had both legal and political reasons to insist that they either hadn't seen the material or that it wasn't very valuable.

Magruder said Mitchell personally chastised Liddy over the limited political usefulness of the information. Some was little more than gossip or personal details about the break-up of Oliver's marriage. "This stuff isn't worth the paper it's printed on," Mitchell told Liddy, according to Magruder.[\[61\]](#)

In an interview with me for my 2004 book, *Secrecy & Privilege*, Oliver laid out his own theory about what the Republicans got off the wiretap on his phone: the Democratic delegate count that was at the center of a last-ditch effort by the party establishment to head off the choice of McGovern and to deliver the nomination instead to an alternative candidate with a better chance to pull the party together and defeat Nixon in November. "The state chairs were very concerned about the McGovern candidacy," Oliver said.

So the state chairmen commissioned a hard count of delegates to see whether McGovern's nomination could be stopped. Other Democratic campaigns had failed to catch fire or blew up in the early months. Secretly, Nixon's reelection team had targeted former front-runner, Sen. Muskie, with dirty tricks like stink bombs exploded at Muskie events, bogus pizza orders and fake mailings that spread dissension between Muskie and other Democrats. Muskie famously melted down in an emotional denunciation of some of these ugly tactics that he blamed on the right-wing *Manchester Union Leader*.

Though knocked from contention in the early primaries, Muskie still had a bloc of delegates in early June as did former Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Washington Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson. Scores of other delegates were uncommitted or tied to favorite sons. Oliver hoped that his personal favorite, Duke University President and former North Carolina Gov. Terry Sanford, might emerge from a deadlocked convention as a unity candidate.

“McGovern was having a hard time getting a majority,” Oliver said. “The state chairmen wanted to know whether or not, if he won the California primary, he would have the nomination wrapped up or whether there was still a chance he could be stopped. The best way to find out was through the state chairmen because in those days not all primaries were binding and not all delegates were bound. ...

“Don Fowler, the state chairman in South Carolina, took the lead in trying to use the state chairmen’s network to get an accurate assessment. Most of the information was gathered by me and Margaret Bethea, a member of Fowler’s staff. We called every state chairman or party executive director to find out where their uncommitted delegates would go. We were doing a real hard count. We knew better than anybody else how many delegates could be influenced, who were really anti-McGovern. We had the best count in the country and it was all coordinated through my telephone.”

So, while Nixon’s political espionage team listened in, Oliver and his little team canvassed state party leaders to figure out how the Democratic delegates planned to vote. “We determined on that phone that McGovern could still be stopped even if he won the California primary,” Oliver said. “It would be very close whether he could ever get a majority.”

After McGovern did sweep California’s winner-take-all primary, the stop-McGovern battle focused on Texas and its Democratic convention, scheduled for June 13, 1972. A Texan himself, Oliver knew the Democratic Party there to be a bitterly divided organization, with many conservative Democrats sympathetic to Nixon and hostile to McGovern and his anti-Vietnam War positions.

One of the best known Texas Democrats, former Gov. John Connally, had joined the Nixon administration in 1970 as Treasury Secretary and was helping the Nixon campaign in 1972. In *The Haldeman Diaries*, Nixon’s chief of staff H.R. Haldeman described Connally providing valuable insights about the inner workings of the Democratic Party. Nixon’s team even broached the idea with Connally that he might replace Spiro Agnew as Nixon’s vice presidential running mate, an offer Connally declined.[\[62\]](#)

Other Texas Democrats were loyal to former President Lyndon Johnson who had battled anti-war activists before deciding against a reelection bid in 1968. “There had been a major fight in Texas between the

Left and the Right, between the liberals and the conservatives,” Oliver said. “They hated each other. It was one of these lifetime things.”

Between the strength of the conservative Democratic machine and the history of hardball Texas politics, the Texas convention looked to Oliver like the perfect place to push through a solid anti-McGovern slate, even though nearly one-third of the state delegates listed McGovern as their first choice. Since there was no requirement for proportional representation, whoever controlled a majority at the state convention could take all the presidential delegates or divide them up among other candidates, Oliver said.

At Sanford’s suggestion, Oliver flew to Texas, but was stunned by what he found at the convention in San Antonio. The Johnson-Connally wing of the party appeared uncharacteristically generous to the McGovern campaign. Also arriving from Washington was one of Connally’s Democratic protégés, the party’s national treasurer Robert Strauss.

“I’m in the hotel and I’m standing in the lobby the day before the convention,” Oliver said. “The elevator opens and there’s Bob Strauss. I was really surprised to see him and he makes a bee-line straight for me. He says, ‘Spencer, how you doing?’ I say, ‘Bob, what are you doing here?’ He says, ‘I’m a Texan, you’re a Texan. Here we are. Who would miss one of these state conventions? Maybe we ought to have lunch.’ He was never that friendly to me before.”

Oliver was curious about Strauss’s sudden appearance because Strauss had never been a major figure in Texas Democratic politics. “He was a Connally guy and had no background in politics except his personal ties to Connally,” Oliver said. “He hadn’t been active in state politics except as Connally’s fund-raiser. He wasn’t a delegate to the state convention.” Plus, Strauss’s chief mentor, Connally, was a member of Nixon’s Cabinet and was planning to head up “Democrats for Nixon” in the fall campaign.

Known as a smooth-talking lawyer, Strauss had made his first major foray into politics as a fund-raiser for Connally’s first gubernatorial race in 1962. Connally then put Strauss on the Democratic National Committee in 1968. Two years later, Connally agreed to join the Nixon administration. “I wouldn’t say that Connally and Strauss are close,” one critic famously told *The New York Times*, “but when Connally eats watermelon, Strauss spits seeds.”[\[63\]](#)

Other old Connally allies held other key positions at the state convention, including state chairman Will Davis. So, it would look as if the liberal, anti-war McGovern would have been in a tight spot, opposed not only by Davis but also by much of the conservative state Democratic leadership and organized labor.

“It was clear that 70 percent of the delegates were anti-McGovern, so they very easily could have coalesced, struck a deal and blocked McGovern,” Oliver said. “That probably would have blocked him from the nomination.”

Oliver informed some of his political friends, including party activists R.C. “Bob” Slagle III and Dwayne Holman, about the plan hatched in Washington to shut McGovern out of Texas delegates.

“They thought it might work and agreed to promote it with the state Democratic leadership,” Oliver said. “Bob went to lay out this plan to stop McGovern and I waited for him. (After he emerged from the meeting,) we went around the corner, and he said, ‘It’s not going to work.’ He said, ‘Will Davis thinks we ought to give McGovern his share of the delegates.’

“I said, ‘What? Will Davis, John Connally’s guy? Does he know that this will give McGovern the nomination?’ He [Davis] said, ‘We shouldn’t have a big fight. We should all agree that everyone gets the percentage they had in the preference. We’ll just let it go.’”

Oliver added, “That was the most astonishing thing I had heard in all my years of Texas politics. There’s never been any quarter given or any asked in this sort of thing. Seventy percent of the delegates were against McGovern. Why did those die-hard conservatives and organized labor want to give him 30 percent of the votes? I was stunned.”

In the end, the convention gave 42 national delegates to the old-time segregationist Alabama Gov. George Wallace and 34 to McGovern, with Hubert Humphrey getting 21 and 33 listed as uncommitted.

Although failing at his Texas mission, Oliver continued to pursue his strategy of promoting Terry Sanford as a compromise Democratic nominee. He proceeded to Mississippi where Hodding Carter, a rising star among moderate Mississippi Democrats, agreed to nominate Sanford at the national convention.

Oliver then returned to Washington, where he discussed the delegate situation by telephone with Fowler and other state chairmen before

traveling to his father's summer home on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Back in Washington, the Gemstone team was under mounting pressure to get more information from the eavesdropping equipment at the DNC's Watergate office, more than was coming in from the bug on Oliver's phone. President Nixon was demanding that his intelligence operatives collect whatever information they could about the Democrats.

"That business of the McGovern watch, it just has to be – it has to be now around the clock," Nixon told presidential aide Charles Colson on June 13, 1972, according to a White House taped conversation. "You never know what you're going to find."[\[64\]](#)

When Howard Hunt suggested to G. Gordon Liddy that the Miami hotels to be used during the upcoming Democratic National Convention would be a more valuable target than the Watergate offices, Liddy checked with his "principals" and reported that they were adamant about sending the team back into the Watergate, Hunt said later.[\[65\]](#) So, Hunt re-contacted the Cuban-Americans in Miami on June 14. They reassembled in Washington on June 16.

For this return entry to the DNC offices, James McCord taped six or eight doors between the corridors and the stairwells on the upper floors and three more in the sub-basement. But McCord applied the tape horizontally instead of vertically, leaving pieces of tape showing when the doors were closed.

Around midnight, security guard Frank Wills came on duty. An African-American high school dropout, Wills was new to the job. About 45 minutes after starting work, he began his first round of checking the building. He discovered a piece of tape over a door latch at the garage level. Thinking that the tape was probably left behind by a building engineer earlier in the day, Wills removed it and went about his business.

A few minutes later, one of the Cuban-American burglars reached the now-locked door. He opened it again by picking the lock and re-taped the latch so others could follow him in. The team went to the sixth floor, entered the DNC offices and got to work installing the additional equipment. Shortly before 2 a.m., Wills made his second round of checks at

the building and spotted the re-taped door. His suspicions aroused, the security man called the Washington Metropolitan Police. A dispatcher reached a nearby plainclothes unit, which pulled up in front of the Watergate.

After telling Wills to wait in the lobby, the police officers began a search of the building, starting with the eighth floor and working their way down to the sixth. The hapless burglars tried to hide behind desks in the DNC's office, but the police officers spotted them and called out, "Hold it!" McCord and four other burglars surrendered. Hunt, Liddy and other members of the Gemstone crew – still across the street at the Howard Johnson's – hurriedly stashed their equipment and papers into suitcases and fled.

Oliver was at his father's cottage on North Carolina's Outer Banks when he heard the news that five burglars had been caught inside the Democratic national headquarters in Washington.

"I thought that was strange," he told me, "why would anybody break into the Democratic National Committee? I mean we don't have any money; the convention's coming up and everybody's moved to Miami; the delegates have been picked and the primaries are over. So why would anybody be in there?"

After returning to Washington, Oliver – like other Democratic staffers – was asked some routine questions by the police and the FBI, but the whole episode remained a mystery.

In July 1972, along with other Democratic officials, Oliver traveled to Miami for the national convention. As the presidential tally wore on into the early morning hours, McGovern barely managed to secure a majority of delegates. To the dismay of organized labor and many party regulars – but to the delight of many anti-war activists – McGovern indeed would be Richard Nixon's opponent.

After the convention, McGovern consolidated his control over the party, appointing Jean Westwood to replace Larry O'Brien as national chairman. But the Democrats remained deeply divided and in desperate need of unity. Oliver emerged as one of the party officials seeking to mend the schism. In early September, it was at one unity meeting – for coordinating voter registration efforts – when Oliver was called away to take an urgent call.

“Someone brought me a note that Larry O’Brien called and wants you to call him,” Oliver said. “I put the note in my pocket. The meeting went on. They brought a second note and said, ‘Larry O’Brien wants you to call.’ At the lunch break, I went upstairs to call O’Brien a little after 12 o’clock. I asked to speak to Larry. Stan Gregg, his deputy, came on the line: ‘Spencer, Larry’s at lunch, but he wanted me to tell you that he’s going to have a press conference at 2 o’clock and he’s going to announce that the burglars that they caught in the Watergate were not in there for the first time. They had been in there before, in May.’

“I was saying to myself, ‘Why’s he telling me all this?’ He said, ‘and they put taps on at least two phones. One of the phones was Larry’s and one was yours.’ I said, ‘What?’ And he said, ‘the tap on Larry’s didn’t work. He’s going to announce all this at 2 o’clock.’”

After digesting the news, Oliver called Gregg back, telling him, “‘Stan, take my name out of that press release. I don’t know why they tapped my phone, but I don’t want my name involved in it. Let Larry say, there were two taps involved and one was on his. But I don’t want to become embroiled in this.’ He said, ‘it’s too late. The press releases have already gone out.’”

Oliver suddenly found himself at the center of a political maelstrom as the DNC moved to file a civil lawsuit accusing the Republicans of violating the federal wiretap statute. As the target of one of the illegal wiretaps, Oliver was the person with the strongest cause of action. His signature on the lawsuit was crucial. The statute also created legal dangers for anyone who got information, even indirectly, from the wiretaps.

“I realized that anybody who received the contents of the intercepted telephone conversation and passed them on, in other words, the fruits of the criminal act, was also guilty of a felony,” Oliver said. “So that meant that if someone listened to my phone, wrote a memo like McCord had done and sent it to the White House or to CREEP, everybody who got those memos and either read them or passed them on was a felon. It was a strict statute. Wherever the chain led, anybody who got them, used them, discussed them, sent them on to someone else was guilty of a felony and subject to criminal as well as civil penalties.”

After the Democratic lawsuit was filed, lawyers for CREEP took Oliver’s deposition. Some of the questions were trolling for any derogatory information they might use against him, Oliver recalled. “CREEP asked if I

was a member of the Communist Party, Weather Underground, ‘were you ever arrested?’”

But some questions reflected facts that would have been contained in Gemstone memos summarizing the taped conversations, Oliver said, such as “Who is Terry Sanford?”

The FBI also launched a full field investigation of Oliver. “They tried to tie me to radical groups and asked questions of my neighbors and my friends about whether I had ever done anything wrong, whether I drank too much, whether I was an alcoholic, whether I had a broken marriage, whether I had had any affairs,” Oliver said. “It was a very intrusive and obnoxious assault on my private life.”

Also, in September 1972 – around the time the Democrats learned about the initial May break-in and the bug on Oliver’s phone – John Connally joined Nixon’s inner circle in discussing what to do about the growing Watergate scandal.

Haldeman’s diary entry for September 13 noted that Nixon “had [former Attorney General John] Mitchell, [Committee to Re-elect the President chairman Clark] MacGregor, and Connally up for dinner and a general political planning session. Spent quite a little time on Watergate.”

Soon, Democrats were encountering solid stonewalls when they tried to crack the Watergate mystery through discovery in the wiretap case. “Our guys couldn’t get anybody’s deposition; everybody was stalling,” Oliver said. “It was clear to me that what’s going on was that the Justice Department was fixed, the FBI was fixed, and the only way we were going to get to the bottom of this was to have an independent investigation.”

In October 1972, Oliver wrote a memo to Sen. Sam Ervin, a moderate Democrat from North Carolina, recommending an independent congressional investigation as the only way to get to the bottom of Watergate, a task Ervin couldn’t undertake until the next year.[\[66\]](#) In the meantime, Nixon’s Watergate cover-up held. The White House successfully tagged the incident as a “third-rate burglary” that didn’t implicate the President or his top aides.

On Election Day, Nixon rolled to a record victory over his preferred Democratic opponent, George McGovern, who only won one state,

Massachusetts. The McGovern debacle had immediate repercussions inside the Democratic National Committee, where the party regulars moved to purge McGovern's people in early December.

"Labor, conservatives, party establishment and others wanted to get rid of the McGovernites and they wanted Jean Westwood to resign," Oliver said. "We had a bruising battle for the chairmanship. It ended up being between George Mitchell [of Maine] and Bob Strauss."

The Strauss candidacy was strange to some Democrats, given his close ties to John Connally, who had led Nixon's drive to get Democrats to cross party lines and vote Republican. Two Texas labor leaders, Roy Evans and Roy Bullock, urged the DNC to reject Strauss because "his most consistent use of his talents has been to advance the political fortune and career of his life-long friend, John B. Connally."[\[67\]](#)

Another Texan, former Senator Ralph Yarborough, said anyone who thinks Strauss could act independently of Connally "ought to be bored for the hollow horn," a farm hand's expression for being crazy.

For his part, Connally offered to do what he could to help his best friend Strauss. Connally said he would "endorse him or denounce him," whichever would help more. Strauss "displays in my judgment the reasonableness that the [Democratic] party has to have," Connally said.[\[68\]](#)

"After a terribly hard-fought battle, Strauss won," Oliver recalled. "Strauss came to the national committee the next week."

Behind the scenes at the White House, Nixon was already touting Connally as the next President, or as Haldeman noted, "he is the only one that any of us would want to see succeed the P. He's got to run as a Republican and he's got to make the move now" to formally switch parties, though there was some talk about accommodating Connally by adding the word "Independent" to Republican Party.

Despite supposedly being on opposite sides of the political fence, Connally and Strauss stayed in touch, with Connally even upbraiding his former protégé for comments that Strauss made in December 1972 about the value of Democratic loyalty. Connally "had called [Strauss] and told him his remarks were ill-advised," Haldeman recounted in his diary. Connally "said he was pretty tough and that Strauss was quite disturbed."

Shortly after taking office in 1969, Nixon had been told by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover about the wiretaps that Johnson had ordered against the Nixon campaign to figure out who was sabotaging the peace talks and how. But Hoover apparently had given Nixon a garbled version of what had happened, leading Nixon to believe that the FBI bugging was more extensive than it was and giving Nixon reason to think that he was the real victim. Nixon also seemed to conclude that Johnson's failure to play the "treason" card before the 1968 election must mean that Johnson was nervous about someone disclosing the extent of the bugging.

According to Nixon's White House tapes, his aide Charles Colson rekindled Nixon's fury about those 1968 wiretaps on July 1, 1972, by noting that a newspaper column claimed that the Democrats had bugged the telephones of Nixon campaign operative Anna Chennault when she was serving as Nixon's intermediary to South Vietnamese officials.

"Oh," Nixon responded, "in '68, they bugged our phones too."

Colson: "And that this was ordered by Johnson."

Nixon: "That's right"

Colson: "And done through the FBI. My God, if we ever did anything like that you'd have the ..."

Nixon: "Yes. For example, why didn't we bug McGovern, because after all he's affecting the peace negotiations?"

Colson: "Sure."

Nixon: "That would be exactly the same thing."

Later, Nixon's allies at *The Washington Star* picked up on Nixon's "Johnson-bugged-us-too" complaint. *Washington Star* reporters contacted Walt Rostow on November 2, 1972, five days before Nixon's reelection. According to a Rostow memo, they asked whether "President Johnson instructed the FBI to investigate action by members of the Nixon camp to slow down the peace negotiations in Paris before the 1968 election. After the election [FBI Director] J. Edgar Hoover informed President Nixon of what he had been instructed to do by President Johnson. President Nixon is alleged to have been outraged."[\[69\]](#)

According to Nixon's White House tapes, he pressed Haldeman on January 8, 1973, to get the story about the 1968 bugging into *The Washington Star*. "You don't really have to have hard evidence, Bob," Nixon told Haldeman. "You're not trying to take this to court. All you have

to do is to have it out, just put it out as authority, and the press will write the Goddamn story, and the *Star* will run it now.”

Haldeman, however, insisted on checking the facts. In *The Haldeman Diaries*, Haldeman included an entry dated January 12, 1973, which contains his book’s only deletion for national security reasons. “I talked to [former Attorney General John] Mitchell on the phone,” Haldeman wrote, “and he said [FBI official Cartha] DeLoach had told him he was up to date on the thing. ...

“A *Star* reporter was making an inquiry in the last week or so, and LBJ got very hot and called Deke [DeLoach's nickname], and said to him that if the Nixon people are going to play with this, that he would release [deleted material -- national security], saying that our side was asking that certain things be done. ... DeLoach took this as a direct threat from Johnson,” Haldeman wrote. “As he [DeLoach] recalls it, bugging was requested on the [Nixon campaign] planes, but was turned down, and all they did was check the phone calls, and put a tap on the Dragon Lady [Anna Chennault].”

In other words, Nixon’s threat to raise the 1968 bugging was countered by Johnson, who threatened to finally reveal that Nixon’s campaign had sabotaged the Vietnam peace talks.

The stakes for Nixon’s blackmail gambit were suddenly raised. However, events went in a different direction. On January 22, 1973, ten days after Haldeman’s diary entry and two days after Nixon began his second term, Johnson died of a heart attack. Haldeman also apparently thought better of publicizing Nixon’s 1968 bugging complaint.

Nixon’s battle to shut down the growing Watergate investigation shifted back to political trench warfare, a battle of attrition, intimidation and influence. Nixon also appears to have counted on help from allies behind the enemy lines of the Democratic Party.

It soon became clear that Strauss’s chief priority as DNC chairman was to put the Watergate scandal into the past. He reached out to Republicans to settle the Watergate civil lawsuit.

“Within a few days of his being there, I was called and told he wanted to see me,” Oliver recalled. “He said, ‘Spencer, you know I want to work with the state party chairs, but now that I’m here there’s something I want

you to do. I want to get rid of this Watergate thing. I want you to drop that lawsuit.'

"I said, 'What?' I didn't think he knew what he was talking about. I said, 'But, Bob, you know that's the only avenue we have for discovery. Why would we want to get out of the lawsuit?' He replied, 'I don't want that Watergate stuff anymore. I want you to drop that lawsuit.' I said, 'Bob, without me, there is no lawsuit under the law.' He said, 'I'm the chairman and I want you to do it.' I said, 'Bob, I work for the state chairmen's association and I see no reason to do that.' It was very unpleasant at the end."

Oliver also found himself cut adrift by the DNC lawyers who said they had to follow Strauss's orders and back off the Watergate lawsuit, though privately they expressed hope that Oliver would find another lawyer and continue pursuing the case, Oliver told me. "I said, 'I can't afford that.'" Oliver was then studying for the bar, supporting three children and working two jobs (for the state chairmen and for the American Council of Young Political Leaders). Plus, his marriage was on the rocks.

Oliver began a search for a new attorney willing to take on the powerful White House. He faced a string of rejections from other lawyers partly because so many Watergate figures had already hired attorneys at major firms that it created conflicts of interests for other law partners. Finally, at a dinner party in Potomac, Maryland, a personal injury lawyer named Joe Koonz offered to take the case on a contingency basis.

"They can't do anything to me," Koonz said, according to Oliver. "I'm a plaintiff's lawyer, a personal injury lawyer. You won't have to pay a thing. If we win, I'll get one-third and you'll get two-thirds, and I guarantee you if I get this thing before a jury, we'll win."

Oliver's success in keeping the civil suit alive represented a direct challenge to Strauss, who continued to seek an end to the DNC's legal challenge to the Republicans over Watergate. While Oliver didn't directly work for Strauss, the national chairman could force Oliver off the payroll.

"He couldn't fire me as executive director of the state chairmen's association, but he could cut off my pay, which he did after a big, nasty, ugly fight," Oliver said. "The state chairmen then paid my salary out of their own funds."

Strauss also moved the DNC out of Watergate, despite the favorable terms on the rent and the building's usefulness as a reminder of Republican

wrongdoing. “Strauss said, ‘I don’t care what it costs to move. I want to get this Watergate thing behind us,’” Oliver said. “It was ridiculous. They moved the office across the city to a worse location for less space at more cost. Plus, they lost the symbol of Watergate.”

By mid-April 1973, Strauss appeared on the verge of achieving his goal of putting the Watergate civil lawsuit into the past. Oliver recalled, “I’m driving into work one day and I hear that Strauss and George [H.W.] Bush [the new Republican national chairman] were holding a press conference at the National Press Club to announce that they were settling the Watergate case. I said he can’t settle that suit without me. The Republicans were holding out \$1 million to settle that suit, but they couldn’t settle it without me.”

On April 17, 1973, Strauss disclosed that CREEP had offered \$525,000 to settle the case. “There has been some serious discussion for many months” between Democratic and CREEP lawyers, Strauss said. “It has become intense in the past several weeks.” Strauss explained his interest in a settlement partly because the Democratic Party was saddled with a \$3.5 million debt and could not afford to devote enough legal resources to the case.

But two days later, Strauss backed off the settlement talks because Oliver and Common Cause, another organization involved in the civil case, balked. “We haven’t the slightest intention of settling short of what we set out to get,” said Common Cause chairman John Gardner. “I think that the Democratic National Committee suit and ours are the two that are least susceptible to control.”

At a press conference, Oliver declared, “I am appalled at the idea of ending the civil suit in the Watergate case through a secretly negotiated settlement and thereby destroying what may be an important forum through which the truth about those responsible may become known. I do not know what motivated Robert Strauss to even contemplate such a step.”

For his part, Strauss said he had discussed a settlement with former Attorney General Mitchell “with the knowledge and approval of the Democratic leadership on the Hill after talking to a number of Democratic governors and with eight or 10 members of the Democratic National Committee.” Asked if he was compromising the interests of the Democratic Party, Strauss responded, “If I was doing so, I was doing so with a lot of company.”[\[70\]](#)

In retrospect, the idea of leading Democrats shying away from the Watergate scandal may seem odd, but the major breaks in the cover-up had yet to occur. At the time, the prospect that the scandal might lead to Nixon's removal from office appeared remote.

But Strauss's opposition to a thorough investigation of the scandal went deeper than that. Indeed, he displayed a determination to shut down the inquiry. After the public flare-up over the aborted Watergate settlement, his strained relationship Oliver turned into a vendetta.

Oliver said, "Strauss started calling around to state chairs, saying 'Did you see what that little SOB said about me? He's accusing me of being a crook.' He really launched a campaign against me."

Meanwhile, inside the Nixon administration, Connally – Strauss's longtime mentor – took a more vocal role on Watergate, meeting with the Republican National Chairman George H.W. Bush and urging President Nixon to take some forceful action to get ahead of the expanding scandal. "Bush says that Connally wants something done drastically, that someone has to walk the plank and some heads have to roll," Haldeman recounted in his diary.

Haldeman discussed Watergate directly with Connally, who urged the White House to go on the offensive against the Senate committee. "We should be outraged at their demagoguery," Connally advised Haldeman, according to the diary entry. "Take them head-on in open session and grandstand it."

Haldeman wrote that Connally wanted senior White House officials to "go up and really put on an act, take the Committee on, try to nail them, that they'd been on a witch-hunt. You need some phrases. You need to be coached and rehearsed, each one of you. You might, by that, screw the Committee in people's minds and destroy it, or at least pull its teeth."[\[71\]](#)

As the scandal continued to grow – and the cover-up created new legal dangers – Nixon even considered appointing Connally as Attorney General. Haldeman doubted Connally would take the job, drawing a response from Nixon that "Connally says he'll do anything he has to do."

Oliver said it was not until spring 1973 that he began putting the pieces of the Watergate mystery together, leading him to believe that the events

around the Texas convention were not simply coincidental but rather the consequence of Republican eavesdropping on his telephone.

If that were true, Oliver suspected, Strauss may have been collaborating with his old mentor Connally both in arranging a Texas outcome that would ensure McGovern's nomination and later in trying to head off the Watergate civil lawsuit. That would not mean that Connally and Strauss necessarily knew about the bugging of the DNC, only that they had been used by Republicans who had access to the information from the Gemstone wire-tappers, Oliver said.

"In my opinion, they were listening to me on that phone do a vote count and they're listening to us start a project to block McGovern's nomination," Oliver said. "They were scared to death that it would be Scoop Jackson or Terry Sanford" emerging as the Democratic nominee.

"This strategy is about to work and we're about to stop McGovern. Now, how do you block that? Well, the man who Nixon admired the most in the world, who he wanted to be his Vice President was John Connally. And who could block it in Texas? John Connally. Who was the state party chairman? Who controlled the machinery? John Connally's people. No Republican could have done it. Only Connally.

"They had to go directly to him because he's the only one who could fix it. But Connally wasn't somebody who could be called by just anybody. So I believe what happened was that they went to Connally – Haldeman or Nixon, maybe Mitchell or [Charles] Colson – but it had to be one of them. They must have briefed him on what they knew, and what they knew is what they got off the interception of my telephone. Nixon wanted Connally to be his successor, but this is in jeopardy if Nixon doesn't get reelected. So Connally may have contacted Will Davis and may have sent Strauss to Texas."

McGovern got his share of the Texas delegates on June 14, 1972, the same day when, according to Hunt, Liddy was told by his "principals" that the burglars needed to return to the Democratic offices at the Watergate to install more eavesdropping equipment. Three days later, the Watergate burglars were arrested.

"Once they were caught, they [Nixon and his men] had to cut off our avenue of discovery, which of course was the civil suit," Oliver said. "I think Strauss may have run for national chairman for that purpose. Strauss wanted to kill the Watergate thing because he may have been part of

this conspiracy to help nominate McGovern, part of the conspiracy to cover up the Watergate matter and put it behind us.

“In desperate fear of exposure later on, he tried to crush me. Somebody told me about a conversation with Strauss when someone said, ‘Spencer’s never going to give in on the Watergate thing,’ and Strauss said, ‘When he doesn’t have any more income, he’ll be a lot more reasonable.’”

As the months wore on and as the Senate Watergate Committee peeled back layer after layer of Nixon’s cover-up, the scandal took a sudden and dangerous turn for Nixon when the committee learned that the President had installed a taping system to record his conversations. With growing desperation in the early months of 1974, Nixon tried to keep control of the tape recordings while offering only limited transcripts to investigators.

Yet, Nixon continued to have a defender in Democratic National Chairman Strauss, who resisted mounting calls from Democrats around the country demanding Nixon’s resignation. At a meeting of Democratic governors in Chicago on April 22, 1974, Strauss called for toning down the rhetoric to avoid future retribution from Nixon and the Republicans.

“I ask you what horrors await this nation if he is able to portray himself as a resigned martyr,” Strauss declared.[\[72\]](#)

The DNC also agreed to settle the Watergate lawsuit in 1974. Though the precise terms were sealed, Strauss said publicly that the Democrats were willing to accept about \$1.25 million. (Oliver eventually settled separately with the Republicans, with those terms also under court seal.) However, by 1974, the Watergate scandal had gathered an unstoppable momentum. The U.S. Supreme Court compelled Nixon to surrender the White House tapes, which established beyond doubt that Nixon had participated in a criminal conspiracy to obstruct investigations into the Watergate scandal.

On August 5, 1974, the White House released a tape from June 23, 1972 – six days after the Watergate arrests – showing that Nixon had ordered the FBI investigation stopped for political reasons. On August 9, 1974, Nixon resigned, handing the presidency to Gerald Ford (who had replaced Agnew after his own resignation in a corruption scandal).

Strauss has never responded to my requests for comment on Oliver’s suspicions that Strauss was serving as Connally’s mole within the top ranks

of the Democratic Party. However, it was true that in the quarter century after Watergate, Strauss would come to epitomize the national Democrat who cultivates cozy relations with Republicans.

Strauss's friendship with George H.W. Bush's confidante James Baker III was cemented when Strauss headed President Jimmy Carter's failed reelection bid in 1980, while Baker held a top job in the Reagan-Bush campaign. After Carter's loss in 1980, the defeated Democratic President joked to his staff that "Bob is a very loyal friend – he waited a whole week after the election before he had dinner with Ronald Reagan."

Strauss also counted himself one of George H.W. Bush's closest friends, accepting an appointment as Bush's ambassador to Moscow in 1991. A senior Bush administration official explained the appointment to *The New York Times* by saying, "The President wants to send one of his best friends" to Moscow.

Nixon's resignation in 1974 marked a watershed historical event, a low point for the Republican/conservative movement in the United States. But the Republican Party and the Right learned crucial lessons from the debacle. Out of all the anger over Watergate emerged an American Right that believed, as an article of faith, that the Democrats and the "liberal press" had turned Nixon's run-of-the-mill indiscretions into a constitutional crisis to undo Nixon's overwhelming electoral mandate of 1972.

Which is why, in retrospect, the decision by President Johnson and his top aides to withhold from the public their evidence of Nixon's sabotage of the Vietnam peace talks in fall 1968 proved to be the opposite of their stated intention: to hide the dirty secret for "the good of the country." As Johnson's national security adviser Walt W. Rostow observed in 1973 as the Watergate scandal was unfolding, Nixon may have dared undertake that domestic spying program because he had gotten away with his 1968 skullduggery unscathed.

Because the Republicans had not been held accountable in 1968, Rostow noted, "There was nothing in their previous experience with an operation of doubtful propriety (or, even, legality) to warn them off, and there were memories of how close an election could get and the possible utility of pressing to the limit – and beyond."

Indeed, if Johnson had revealed Nixon's peace-talk sabotage in 1968 – or if Rostow had released the evidence after Johnson's death in 1973 – the public's perception of Nixon and Watergate might have been dramatically

different. Instead of a one-off affair that could be blamed on some overzealous subordinates, the break-in at the Democratic headquarters might have been seen as part of a larger – and far more sinister – pattern.

If the American people had seen the evidence that Johnson had collected on Nixon keeping the South Vietnamese government away from the Paris peace talks in 1968 – with promises of a better deal if he got elected – it would have been difficult for even die-hard conservatives to believe that Nixon's resignation over Watergate was undeserved.

Though Walt Rostow died in 2003, I asked his daughter, Ann, what might have caused her father to decide in 1973 that the evidence should be kept secret for another half-century. She responded on July 25, 2012, "I know my father took secrecy very seriously, but he was not a control freak as a man. Maybe he thought that the damage was done so the material should be shelved for future historians."

Just a few years after Nixon's resignation, still angry about *The Washington Post's* role in exposing Nixon, wealthy conservatives got to work building their own media infrastructure. They also invested in think tanks to assure more loyalty in Washington's power circles. And, they financed attack groups to go after troublesome reporters.

Meanwhile, the Democrats and the Left grew complacent, assuming that the painful lessons of Watergate and the various election reforms enacted in the 1970s would protect the country from similar crimes of states in the future. The belief was that Washington's checks and balances would continue working as they had to stop Nixon.

But the Democrats and the Left underestimated the toughness and determination of the Republicans and the Right. The Democrats and the Left also failed to grasp that Nixon might have departed the White House, but he remained an *eminence grise* of the Republican Party. His overarching message to the Right was here to stay: You win by playing the hardest of hardball.

Chapter Five: The October Surprise

Lawrence Barcella was on his death bed in summer 2010 when he began sending me a series of e-mails, defending part of his life's legacy. In 1992-93, as chief counsel of a special House task force, Barcella had overseen the debunking of the so-called "October Surprise" case, allegations that the Republicans in 1980 had pulled a page out of Richard Nixon's book of dirty tricks to put themselves back into power.

Just as the available evidence indicated that Nixon's 1968 campaign torpedoed President Lyndon Johnson's bid to end the Vietnam War – thus clearing the way for Nixon's narrow victory – there was similar evidence that Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign sank President Jimmy Carter's attempt to resolve a hostage crisis with Iran, thus denying Carter a last-minute boost before that election.

But Barcella's October Surprise investigation had decided that there was "no credible evidence" to believe that the Reagan team had done so. Yet in the nearly two decades since that finding – and three decades after the events in question – Barcella's elaborate construct of dubious and interlocking alibis for the key figures had decayed to the point of collapse.

Even as his strength ebbed in his fight with cancer, Barcella fired off angry e-mails to me that mixed outrage at my stubborn questions with admissions that his congressional task force had ignored key evidence and taken indefensible shortcuts to reach a conclusion of Republican innocence. He took special umbrage at my choice of the word "hide" to describe what he had done with a remarkable report from the Russian government regarding what its intelligence files had shown about dueling attempts by the Carter administration and the Reagan campaign to negotiate with Iran over the hostage crisis in 1980.

In January 1993, as the House task force was wrapping up its work, a military and intelligence committee of the Russian Duma provided unprecedented cooperation to a U.S. national security investigation by sharing information from old Soviet intelligence files. A six-page report, responding to a request from the House task force, corroborated allegations that in 1980 key Republicans, including Reagan's campaign chief (and later

CIA director) William J. Casey and Reagan's vice presidential running mate (and former CIA director) George H.W. Bush, had engaged in secret contacts with Iranian emissaries in Europe. The report also implicated Robert Gates, who in January 1993 was the sitting CIA director. When the Russian Report arrived on January 11, 1993, George H.W. Bush was still the U.S. President.

The report was prepared under the direction of Sergei Stepashin, chairman of the Supreme Soviet's Committee on Defense and Security issues. (Later, I was told by a well-placed government source in Europe who had close ties to senior Russian officials that Russian authorities had considered the report's contents "a bomb," representing what they regarded as reliable intelligence on this topic.)

Yet, rather than make the Russian Report public – with its conclusions contradictory to his own – Barcella had stuck it in a box with other unpublished material from the investigation. He told me that he envisioned it would disappear into some giant government warehouse like in the closing scene from "Raiders of the Lost Ark," in other words it would never be seen again.

However, I gained access to the House task force's files in late 1994 and found the Russian Report. It had been translated by the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and was included in a "confidential" cable addressed to the House task force's chairman Lee Hamilton, the centrist Democratic congressman from Indiana.[\[73\]](#)

In 2010, referring to the fate of the Russian Report in an article at the investigative news Web site, *Consortiumnews.com*, I had characterized what Barcella had done as "hiding" it. After all, he had not made the report public; had not even distributed it to congressional members of the task force; and had mixed it in with hundreds of other documents in a pile of boxes that he assumed no one would ever see. But the verb upset him.

In one e-mail, Barcella scolded me: "You're no longer merely cherry-picking facts and misrepresenting events, but flat out lying. I'm not going to take the time or expend the energy to go line by line over what you've spewed out the past year or so, revealing as that would be regarding your falsehoods. You say I simply decided to hide the Russian rpt. That's a lie."

Yet, despite Barcella's anger over my choice of verb, I learned in 2010 that he may not even have shown the stunning report to Hamilton, though it was addressed to the congressman. When I interviewed Hamilton in spring

2010 he told me that “I don’t recall seeing it.” After hearing that from Hamilton, I contacted Barcella by e-mail and he acknowledged that he didn’t “recall whether I showed [Hamilton] the Russian report or not.”

In a follow-up e-mail, Barcella amended that recollection slightly stating that “I do specifically recall discussing it with Lee,” adding that he had previously “related to you my specific recollection of that discussion.” But the discussion that Barcella had told me about earlier did not deal with the Russian Report, but about other evidence of Republican guilt that had arrived in December 1992 at the tail end of the task force’s inquiry.

According to Barcella, that new incriminating information justified extending the investigation three more months so the evidence could be evaluated. He said he asked Hamilton for the extra time, but the chairman turned him down. So, Barcella simply pressed ahead with a finding of Republican innocence, shipping the exculpatory report off the printers by early January 1993. In other words, by the time the Russian Report arrived on January 11, 1993, the task force had already completed its work. Its debunking report was set for release two days later.

Hamilton also told me in two interviews, including one after checking with his former staff aide Michael Van Dusen, that he had no recollection at all of the Russian Report. One might have thought it would have stuck in his mind since it represented possibly the first time that the two former Cold War adversaries had cooperated on a historical intelligence investigation – and the Russians had flatly contradicted the finding of the task force that Hamilton had chaired.

In 2010, I interviewed several other former congressmen who had served on the task force as well as former staff aides, none of whom had any recollection of the Russian Report. There was simply no corroborating evidence that Barcella had shared the Russian Report with any of the other key officials on the task force.

It also was clear that the last-minute arrival of the Russian Report would have represented an embarrassment to the task force which had already begun briefing selected reporters on its October Surprise debunking. On January 13, 1993, the task force released its report at a news conference at which Hamilton and Republican vice-chair Henry Hyde discussed the findings. At that time, Barcella made no reference to the Russian Report, nor did anyone else.

As the task force closed down its offices, the Russian Report was unceremoniously stuck in a box with other unpublished material from the investigation. The taped-up boxes were then moved to House office space that had been carved out of the Rayburn House Parking Garage. There, the boxes were dumped on the floor of an abandoned Ladies Room.

After the Republican electoral sweep of Congress in November 1994, I thought that the change in control of the House might offer me a last chance to examine these records, so I obtained permission from staffers on the House Foreign Affairs Committee to see the documents.

Starting on December 20, 1994, I made several trips to the Rayburn House Parking Garage to pore through the documents, copying as many pages as I was allowed (they set a limit of a dozen pages per trip). Some of the documents, like the Russian Report, appeared to still be classified. Some of the packed-up records were marked “secret” and “top secret.” So I volunteered to copy them myself without saying anything about the bright red “secret” stamps. [\[**\]](#)

My interest in the House task force documents stemmed from my work for PBS “Frontline” on two documentaries in 1991 and 1992 related to the October Surprise issue, essentially whether the Iran-Contra arms-for-hostage deals of 1985 and 1986 had a prequel in 1980, whether President Ronald Reagan’s secret arms sales to Iran in mid-decade had their origins in a treacherous deal with Iranians at the start of the decade.

The October Surprise story of 1980 also could be viewed as a sequel to Richard Nixon’s sabotage of President Johnson’s Vietnam peace talks in 1968. Both allegedly involved Republican machinations to prevent a Democratic president from achieving a foreign-policy success that could have provided a last-minute electoral boost.

In the mid-1980s, I had covered the early stages of what is now known as the Iran-Contra Affair for *The Associated Press*. In June 1985, I wrote the first story mentioning the secret financial dealings of National Security Council aide Oliver North on behalf of the Nicaraguan Contra rebels. Many of my later stories – some written with my AP colleague Brian Barger – exposed other parts of the clandestine White House network, but they

encountered categorical denials from the Reagan administration and pushback from pro-Reagan media outlets.[\[11\]](#)

I enjoyed a brief period of vindication in fall 1986 when events in Central America and the Middle East demonstrated that Reagan and his team had been lying. Many of the secrets about the White House operations to arm the Nicaraguan Contras and to sell missiles to Iran's Islamist government finally spilled out into public view.

The confirmation that there indeed had been a covert operation run by Reagan's White House brought me a job offer from *Newsweek*, which had lagged far behind on the Iran-Contra developments. But after I took the new job, I discovered inside *Newsweek* a continuing resistance to pursuing the scandal with any aggressiveness. The attitude of *Newsweek's* executive editor Maynard Parker was that it might not be "good for the country" for the press corps to push too hard on the scandal and possibly provoke another Watergate-style constitutional crisis that could drive another Republican president from office.

Though I covered the Iran-Contra hearings as they unfolded in 1987 and continued to break a number of stories about the scandal for *Newsweek*, it became clear that Parker and other senior editors preferred that the complex Iran-Contra business go away. So, in June 1990 – after three years of clashes with Parker and other top brass over their desire to wrap up the story, against my insistence that the Reagan administration was engaged in a sophisticated cover-up – I left the magazine.

In my view, the *Newsweek* editors, like many others in the mainstream U.S. news media, had too readily accepted the Iran-Contra cover story, which held that President Reagan and Vice President Bush had little to do with the scandal and that the problem had just been their overzealous underlings, the likes of Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North.

Contrary to that take on the story, my reporting indicated that Reagan and Bush were much more deeply implicated and that the secret arms shipments to Iran had not begun in 1985 – as the official story claimed – but much earlier. The arms apparently started flowing almost immediately after Reagan took office on January 20, 1981, and Iran simultaneously released the 52 American hostages whose suffering over 444 days of captivity had sealed President Carter's political doom.

After departing *Newsweek* in June 1990, I was approached by PBS "Frontline" with an offer to investigate whether those early arms shipments

were the result of a pre-election deal in 1980. There had been scattered claims to that effect from intelligence operatives and private arms dealers, but they were mostly shadowy figures who had circled around the edges of the Iran-Contra scandal. In many cases, their credibility was suspect.

Feeling that my career had been damaged enough by my battles with *Newsweek* editors over Iran-Contra, I was reluctant to jump back into the swamp of conflicting allegations and denials. But I agreed to sign on to the “Frontline” project in part because I learned that PBS producers, working on another program, already had a videotaped interview with Reagan’s first Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis, a serious career diplomat who had conducted a brief inquiry into an ill-fated Israeli shipment of U.S. military equipment to Iran that had crashed (or was shot down) over the Soviet Union in July 1981.

“It was clear to me after my conversations with people on high that indeed we had agreed that the Israelis could transship to Iran some American-origin military equipment,” Veliotis said in the interview. In checking out the Israeli flight in 1981, Veliotis came to believe that the Reagan camp’s dealings with Iran dated back to before the 1980 election.

“It seems to have started in earnest in the period probably prior to the election of 1980, as the Israelis had identified who would become the new players in the national security area in the Reagan administration,” Veliotis said. “And I understand some contacts were made at that time.”[\[11\]](#)

Over the years about two dozen witnesses – including Israeli and European intelligence officers, senior Iranians officials, Republican operatives, CIA agents and even Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat – have provided details about the secret 1980 contacts between Republicans and Iranians. As part of the “Frontline” project, I interviewed a number of them, trying to piece together their fragmented stories amid escalating anger directed at our investigation from the old Reagan team and their successors in President George H.W. Bush’s administration.

By April 1991, after more than a half-year investigation, “Frontline” producers felt we had enough from interviews and documents to air a documentary that laid out the available evidence without reaching a hard-and-fast conclusion to the October Surprise mystery. Still, the PBS documentary – along with a *New York Times* op-ed by former National Security Council aide (and Iran expert) Gary Sick – spurred interest in finally getting to the bottom of the alleged hostage-delay deal of 1980.

In Congress, Spencer Oliver, the same man who had experienced Republican dirty tricks as far back as 1972 when Watergate burglars put a bug on his phone, got the ball rolling from his position as chief counsel of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He envisioned two separate investigations, one by the House and one by the Senate, to make another Republican cover-up more difficult.

But there was strong pushback from the Republicans, who wanted to protect President Reagan's legacy and President Bush's reelection hopes. The Israeli government also saw the danger from potential disclosures that it had manipulated U.S. politics at the presidential level.

At "Frontline," our information indicated that Israel had played a key middleman role in handling the arms transfers for the Republicans, apparently because Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin feared that a second term for President Carter would have meant increased pressure to create a Palestinian state.

As calls for an October Surprise inquiry rose in 1991, the Israelis and their American neoconservative allies also were unnerved by the emergence of former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe as a witness. Ben-Menashe began opening up to me in February 1990 when I was still a *Newsweek* correspondent. I interviewed him at the federal prison in Lower Manhattan where he was being held on charges of conspiring to ship U.S. aircraft to Iran. After sitting down with him in a small interview room, I informed him that Israeli government officials were denying that he had ever worked for them.

"I know that the government is denying me," said Ben-Menashe, a solidly built man of medium height. "But I made a decision when I realized that no one was coming to my defense to get me out of prison. I decided my only chance was to talk about what I did for Israel and to tell the truth about everything. Telling the truth is my only hope."

Feeling abandoned by the Israeli government, Ben-Menashe began talking about his life as a young Israeli intelligence officer who had emigrated from Iran as a teen-ager and who became useful to his Likud superiors because he spoke fluent Farsi and knew some of the young revolutionaries who had taken power in Iran in 1979.

Brash and self-confident – even in his beige prison jumpsuit – Ben-Menashe offered me a strikingly different version of the Iran-Contra scandal than had been widely accepted in Official Washington. Rather than

a covert arms-for-hostage policy limited to 1985 and 1986, as the accepted narrative claimed, Ben-Menashe traced the scandal's origins to 1980 when he said Prime Minister Begin – furious with pressures from Carter to return the Sinai to Egypt and to accept a Palestinian state – threw in his lot with Reagan's presidential campaign.

At the time Carter's re-election hopes hinged on freeing 52 Americans held hostage by Iranian militants. But Ben-Menashe said the Israelis instead offered their services to the Republicans, helping them strike a deal with the Iranians that the hostages should be kept until after Reagan was victorious. Then the Iranians would be rewarded with access to U.S. military equipment.

During a series of interviews with me during 1990, Ben-Menashe identified himself as an intelligence officer who was part of the Israeli-Republican operation that met Iranian emissaries in Paris in October 1980. Among the other participants in the Paris meeting, Ben-Menashe said, were George H.W. Bush, William Casey and CIA officers Robert Gates, Donald Gregg and George Cave. Representing Iran, Ben-Menashe said, was Ayatollah Mehdi Karrubi, then a senior aide to Iran's revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

As it turned out, the U.S. hostages were indeed held through the U.S. election in 1980; Carter went down to a humiliating defeat; and the hostages were only released after Reagan was sworn in as President on January 20, 1981. According to Ben-Menashe, the Republican-Iranian deal also opened a secret and lucrative arms pipeline from Israel to Iran, which was then fighting a war with Iraq.

Ben-Menashe said Israel's arms shipments had the secret approval of senior officials in the Reagan administration. The clandestine operation had many twists and turns but eventually led to the arms sales revealed in the Iran-Contra scandal, he said.

Ben-Menashe added that the relations between his Likud superiors and the Reagan administration began to fray in the mid-1980s when Israel learned that Reagan had approved a separate channel of military assistance to Iraq, a development that Israel felt jeopardized its own national security. Out of those U.S.-Israeli tensions – and internal Israeli rivalries between Likud and the Labor Party – secrets of the Iran-Contra scandal began to spill into public view, he said.

As provocative as Ben-Menashe's account was, the first thing I needed to do in early 1990 was to check out his *bona fides*. According to *Newsweek's* bureau in Israel, government spokesmen were dismissing him as an "impostor" who had never worked for the government.

But Ben-Menashe's mother in Israel sent me a packet of documentary evidence, including several letters of reference describing Ben-Menashe's decade-long work within the External Relations Department of the Israel Defence Forces. One letter, signed by IDF Col. Pesah Melowany, said Ben-Menashe had been "responsible for a variety of complex and sensitive assignments which demanded exceptional analytical and executive capabilities."[\[74\]](#)

After I obtained the letters, Israeli spokesmen reversed themselves, confirming that Ben-Menashe had worked for the government, but they began insisting that he was only a "low-level translator" – despite the contradictory information in the letters. I also was able to confirm that Ben-Menashe had traveled widely on Israel's behalf, including trips to Poland and other countries in the Soviet bloc, far beyond a "translator" role.

Though the Israeli authorities clearly were lying, they still managed to galvanize friendly journalists who went out of their way to discredit Ben-Menashe as a compulsive liar. Since I was on my way out of *Newsweek* in spring 1990 – and there was no way the senior editors there would ever agree to reopen an investigation into how the Iran-Contra scandal began – I set aside my notes and documents relating to Ben-Menashe. But I revisited him and his account after I began the "Frontline" investigation in summer 1990.[\[§§\]](#)

At his federal trial in fall 1990 on charges of illegal aircraft sales to Iran, Ben-Menashe used the same letters of reference as well as testimony from people who had dealt with him during his Israeli intelligence work to convince a New York jury that his contacts with Iran were indeed done for the Israeli government. The jury unanimously acquitted Ben-Menashe of the charges.

After his release, Ben-Menashe continued divulging information to me and other journalists about the October Surprise story, the Israeli arms pipeline to Iran, and the parallel covert U.S. military shipments to Iraq, a

new scandal that was dubbed “Iraqgate.” Ben-Menashe also provided fresh details about Israel’s nuclear weapons program to investigative journalist Seymour Hersh for his book, *The Samson Option*. Silencing and discrediting Ben-Menashe quickly became a high priority for the Israeli government and American neocons.

In the months after his acquittal in New York, there was even the prospect that Ben-Menashe might suffer the same fate as another Israeli whistleblower, Mordecai Vanunu, a nuclear technician who had worked at Israel’s Dimona reactor where physicists had built a top-secret nuclear weapons arsenal. In 1986, Vanunu traveled to Australia, where he shared his photos and his story with a Sydney newspaper, which encouraged him to take his evidence to a sister newspaper in London where the story could be more thoroughly checked out. In London, Vanunu presented his evidence to the London *Sunday Times*, which began the process of vetting the information.

However, in the meantime, Vanunu was seduced by an attractive young woman who convinced him to take a trip to Rome. There, Israeli agents kidnapped Vanunu and spirited him back to Israel. After Vanunu’s kidnapping, the *Sunday Times* published his evidence, confirming what had long been suspected, that Israel possessed a nuclear arsenal. As retaliation, the Israeli government prosecuted Vanunu for leaking Israeli government secrets and sentenced him to 18 years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement.

Ben-Menashe represented a similar, though arguably more dangerous, threat to Israeli government secrets. Not only could Ben-Menashe provide Hersh fresh details about Israel’s nuclear capabilities (which Hersh said he confirmed from other sources), but Ben-Menashe had inside information about Israel’s clandestine arms pipeline to Iran and knew about the behind-the-scenes disagreements between Israel and the Reagan administration over the secret U.S. tilt to Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War. Ben-Menashe said Israel took particular umbrage at the Reagan team helping Iraq secure precursor chemicals for unconventional weapons that Israel feared might be turned against its people.

Like Vanunu, Ben-Menashe also traveled to Australia, arriving several months after his acquittal. On April 18, 1991, Ben-Menashe flew into Sydney aboard Qantas Flight 12, still carrying his Israeli passport, according to Australian journalist Marshall Wilson who reported the story

for *Consortiumnews.com* after securing Ben-Menashe's immigration records two decades later from Australian government archives.

Ben-Menashe told Australian immigration officials that he intended to write a book about his work for the Israeli government. Then, on May 15, 1991, Ben-Menashe submitted to Australian authorities what amounted to a plea for political asylum. In a 25-page declaration, Ben-Menashe stated: "My case is an unprecedented case of political persecution by two governments. It was an attempt by Israel and the United States to cover up their relations with Iran since 1979."[\[75\]](#)

Ben-Menashe wrote that after his arrest, he "was not willing to keep quiet and be discredited by pleading guilty to the bogus charges. I did not accept my government's proposal to do so. Any arms sales to Iran that I was involved in was solely in the capacity of being an employee of the Israeli government. Everything I did was authorised by the appropriate authorities in the Israeli and United States governments.

"Since I did not go along with the program and decided I would truthfully defend myself in court, I was disowned by the Israeli Government and will be prosecuted for breaking the Official Secrets Act if I return. ... I will be prosecuted ... behind closed doors, 'for national security reasons,' and I will never again see the light of day."

(Ben-Menashe later told Australian authorities that his mother in Tel Aviv had been approached by officers of Shin Bet, Israel's secret police, who "tried to convince [her] that it would be in my best interests to plead guilty to all charges before the Federal Superior Court [in New York] if I wished to avoid prosecution in Israel."[\[76\]](#))

Ben-Menashe said his case also had ramifications for the U.S. government. "As an aftermath of my [1990] trial a new scandal has broken directly involving the President of the United States [George H.W. Bush]," Ben-Menashe wrote, "about the President being involved in an arms-for-hostage release delay deal [with Iran] in 1980.

"I am a central witness on that issue. Democratic members of the US Congress are going to speak to me about that and other issues involving US sales of unconventional weapon systems to Iraq, all connected to the present [George H.W. Bush] administration of the US. ... Paradoxically speaking I am now being punished for being acquitted."

Fearing that he would be "Vanunued" – that is, seized and returned to Israel to face a long prison term – if he didn't maintain a public profile,

Ben-Menashe offered to cooperate with congressional investigators. At the request of Spencer Oliver and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, he agreed to be interviewed when he returned to the United States in May 1991. Since I had some follow-up questions to ask him, I also requested that he carve out some time to meet with me.

However, before Ben-Menashe's scheduled flight from Australia to the United States, I received a tip from a long-time intelligence source who claimed a plan was afoot in which officials of the Bush administration would detain Ben-Menashe after his flight touched down in Los Angeles and then transfer him onto a flight bound for Israel. I wasn't sure what to make of the tip, so I contacted congressional investigators with the source's claim.

Oliver checked with the Bush administration and called me back to say that the response he got made him think that the warning might be true. Oliver said he needed time to make it clear to the Bush administration that interference with a congressional investigation would not be tolerated.

I then called Ben-Menashe, who was packing to leave for the Sydney airport. I suggested that he might wish to delay his departure, which he did. Subsequently, Oliver called me back saying he had received assurances from the Bush administration that Ben-Menashe would be allowed into the United States. I passed on the information to Ben-Menashe, who then rescheduled his flight to Washington.

Ben-Menashe's flight headed for the United States on the weekend of May 18-19, 1991. On arrival in Los Angeles he was pulled aside by U.S. immigration officers. He was subjected to aggressive questioning but was allowed to continue to Washington where I met him at Dulles Airport. Normally confident verging on arrogance, Ben-Menashe was shaken by the experience. He said he suspected that he was still under surveillance and that his life might be in jeopardy.

I brought him to my house in Arlington, Virginia, where we talked for a while. When I offered to drive him to his hotel, he hesitantly asked if he could stay in my guest room. He said he was fearful what might happen to him if he checked in alone at a hotel. Though uncomfortable with the idea, I agreed to his request and made up the guest room for him.

With a nervous chuckle, Ben-Menashe said he didn't think anyone would break into the Washington-area home of an American journalist and his family. I'm not much for drama and tend to get annoyed when anyone

suggests a scenario that sounds too much like a movie script, but I didn't want to second-guess an experienced intelligence operative who had made this trip to Washington to give testimony that some very powerful people would have preferred not to hear.

Two decades later when I told Ben-Menashe that I was preparing an article about this incident, he told me that he subsequently had spoken with an old friend in Israeli intelligence who confirmed that there was a plan to deny him entry to the U.S. and ship him to Israel – or find some other way to neutralize him.

According to Ben-Menashe, this ex-Mossad official said Israeli intelligence, though frustrated in their attempt to get their man, did have Ben-Menashe under surveillance and considered simply killing him if they could avoid having the murder traced back to Israeli authorities.

After that short stay in my house, Ben-Menashe was debriefed by House Foreign Affairs Committee counsel Oliver. Ben-Menashe recounted his story of the October Surprise meetings and other aspects of his intelligence work for Israel. Oliver said he was particularly struck by one of Ben-Menashe's seemingly implausible claims, that he had spent time on assignment in Ayacucho, Peru. Oliver was amazed when he was later able to locate someone who had worked in that remote Peruvian city and remembered dealing with this mysterious Israeli. After speaking with Oliver, Ben-Menashe returned to Australia to resume work on his memoir, which was later published as *Profits of War*.

Though Ben-Menashe might have slipped out of the physical reach of the Israeli government, he remained a target of their propaganda. His credibility would be relentlessly assailed even as many of his unlikely claims continued to be confirmed, including his assertion that media mogul Robert Maxwell had done intelligence work for Israel.

Maxwell's media empire counterattacked by suing Sy Hersh for having included Ben-Menashe's claims in *The Samson Option*, but Hersh prevailed when some of Ben-Menashe's details were confirmed and after Maxwell died mysteriously at sea off the Canary Islands. Additional information also surfaced in support of Ben-Menashe's allegations about the Reagan's administration's secret tilt in favor of the Iraqis in the Iran-Iraq War.

Nevertheless, American journalists with close ties to Israel pounded away at Ben-Menashe's credibility. He also hurt himself with his

inconsistent and highhanded way of treating some reporters, offering to help them with information and then reneging.

Regarding the October Surprise issue, Israel wasn't the only powerful player wanting the story to go away. The scandal also threatened key figures of the American Establishment. The evidence pointed to involvement by banker David Rockefeller, who straddled the worlds of high finance with his Chase Manhattan Bank and public policy through his Council on Foreign Relations and Trilateral Commission.

Also linked to the October Surprise story was Rockefeller's most famous protégé, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a figure in Nixon's interference with President Johnson's Vietnam peace talks in 1968. Over the years, even as he worked for the unlikable Nixon, Kissinger built an influential network of political/media connections including Katharine Graham, the publisher of the Washington Post/Newsweek Company.

In 1979, as the Shah of Iran's bank, Chase Manhattan faced possible bankruptcy if the revolutionary Iranian government had succeeded in yanking out all of the Shah's fortune from the bank's vaults. The new regime believed that total was about \$6 billion, although Rockefeller – in his autobiography *Memoirs* – claimed the balances had been reduced to about \$500 million by the middle of that year.

Nevertheless, it was a personal request to Rockefeller from the Shah's strong-willed twin sister, Princess Ashraf, on March 23, 1979, that brought the full force of Chase Manhattan's influence behind a public/private campaign to pressure President Carter to admit the Shah into the United States for cancer treatment. That lobbying campaign included a face-to-face confrontation between Rockefeller and Carter himself. Though Carter initially rebuffed those appeals, his eventual acquiescence to the demand was the act that infuriated radical Iranian students who then stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, taking its personnel hostage.

Ironically, Carter's retaliatory freeze on Iran's funds in American banks proved fortuitous for Chase, which never had to return the rest of the Shah's fortune. In *Memoirs*, Rockefeller wrote, "Carter's 'freeze' of official Iranian assets protected our position, but no one at Chase played a role in

convincing the administration to institute it.” However, Rockefeller’s successful lobbying to gain the Shah’s admission had created the circumstances that made the freeze inevitable.

Even after Carter’s freeze on Iranian assets, Rockefeller’s men remained active around the hostage crisis as the lingering stalemate made Carter look weak and ineffectual. A narrative was growing that Ronald Reagan was the one who would restore American honor and make U.S. adversaries show the proper respect.

As the presidential campaign headed into its home stretch, Rockefeller, along with senior advisers, such as former CIA officer Archibald Roosevelt, Joseph Verner Reed and Kissinger, were in contact with Reagan’s campaign team, including its director William Casey, who was the *eminence grise* at the center of the October Surprise mystery. [***]

So, when the possibility of a serious October Surprise investigation emerged in the latter half of 1991, an intimidating phalanx of powerful players was arrayed against it, from Ronald Reagan’s many defenders to the sitting President George H.W. Bush to David Rockefeller’s business and government circles to past and present officers in the CIA to the Israeli government.

If Congress conducted a tough-minded investigation – as Spencer Oliver hoped – there was no telling where it might go and who might be harmed. But those who conceivably would find themselves in the line of fire included some of the most powerful and influential people on earth.

Ultimately, the task of “debunking” the growing body of evidence about a Reagan-Iranian 1980 deal fell to the neoconservative *New Republic* and my old adversaries inside the Establishment-oriented *Newsweek*. *The New Republic* commissioned an article by Steven Emerson, known for his close ties to Likud and Israeli intelligence, while the *Newsweek* article was personally overseen by executive editor Maynard Parker, a CFR member, a Kissinger ally – and my chief nemesis when I was trying to pursue the Iran-Contra scandal inside the magazine.

Though the articles would heap plenty of ridicule on Ben-Menashe and other witnesses, the centerpiece of both stories was to be a takedown of Iranian businessman and CIA operative Jamshid Hashemi. He had been

featured in an ABC News' "Nightline" interview describing meetings that he and his late banker brother Cyrus Hashemi had arranged in Madrid between Casey and Ayatollah Mehdi Karrubi in late July 1980, with a follow-up in August.

Jamshid Hashemi, who had been a mid-level official in Iran's new revolutionary government, had been recruited by the CIA in early 1980 to assist in resolving the hostage crisis. His younger brother Cyrus was another recruit of the CIA. But Jamshid claimed that the two of them began working behind the scenes to help Republicans make contact with key Iranians to delay the hostage release.

Unbeknownst to the Carter administration, Cyrus Hashemi had ties to William Casey through a longtime Casey associate, John Shaheen. Casey and Shaheen had served together in the World War II's Office of Strategic Services, and Shaheen and Cyrus Hashemi were collaborating on an oil refinery deal in 1980.

After broadcasting the interview on Jamshid Hashemi's claims, "Nightline" discovered that Casey had snuck off for an unannounced trip in late July 1980 to attend a World War II historical conference in London, putting him just a short flight from Madrid. But *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* set out to prove that Casey couldn't have attended a two-day meeting in Madrid in late July as described by Jamshid Hashemi.

Reporters for the two magazines zeroed in on the attendance records for the London conference, seizing on some confusing checks and notations to conclude that Casey had attended the morning session on Monday, July 28. Thus, they maintained there could have been no two-day window for the Madrid meetings. Ergo, Jamshid Hashemi was a liar.

Inside *Newsweek*, investigative journalist Craig Unger, who had been hired to work on the October Surprise story, realized that the magazine was misreading the attendance records and warned executive editor Parker and his October Surprise debunking team. "They told me, essentially, to fuck off," Unger told me. "It was the most dishonest thing that I've been through in my life in journalism."

With Unger's objections suppressed, *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* rushed out matching debunking articles splashed across their covers on the same weekend in mid-November 1991. The two magazines declared the October Surprise story "a myth" and "a conspiracy theory" run wild. "Casey is ... accounted for ... the night of July 27 and all day except for a

brief absence, on July 28,” said *The New Republic* article by Steven Emerson and Jesse Furman. “This makes Jamshid’s story of two consecutive days of meetings impossible.”

The New Republic faulted “Nightline” for failing “to find out that Casey was not in Madrid, but in London.” The magazine also mocked anchor Ted Koppel for a “Nightline” update, which was the first story to note that Casey had made the unannounced trip to London, despite his campaign duties. Koppel had observed that Madrid was only a 90-minute flight from London, making Jamshid Hashemi’s story possible. “Nightline was wrong again,” Emerson and Furman gloated.[\[77\]](#)

I was ridiculed, too, as one of the “entrepreneurial journalists” who had investigated the October Surprise story, presumably for financial gain. I also was assigned the role of Jamshid Hashemi’s “supporter” and a believer that Cyrus Hashemi “was murdered to shut him up” and that “the U.S. government has covered up the murder.” All that was news to me. I had never believed or written that Cyrus Hashemi was murdered, nor that the motive for this supposed murder would have been the October Surprise case, nor that the U.S. government was covering it up. Cyrus Hashemi had died in London in 1986 from what doctors diagnosed as acute leukemia.

The dual debunking stories brought relief and delight to many corners of the Washington-to-New York power corridor, especially at the White House where President George H.W. Bush’s team could now go on the offensive against the remnants of the broader Iran-Contra scandal. On Capitol Hill, the impact of the one-two punch of *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* could not be overstated. Whatever momentum there was for a thorough investigation of the October Surprise issue quickly dissipated.

On the Senate side, Republicans mounted a filibuster to block special funding for an investigation. On the House side, an investigative task force was created but it was soon clear that its principal role would be to ratify the debunking, not dig aggressively for the truth. There was less happiness inside “Nightline,” where the producer who had arranged the Jamshid Hashemi interview soon found herself out of a job.

There also was little attention when our reporting team at “Frontline” determined that the London alibi, which *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* featured so prominently, was false. It turned out that the magazines had misread the attendance records and failed to interview some of the key people at the conference, including that morning’s speaker, historian Robert

Dallek. He told us that he had looked for Casey around the modest-sized board room at London's Imperial War Museum and found him missing.

A closer examination of the attendance records also revealed a notation next to Casey's box saying "came at 4 pm." In other words, the much-trumpeted debunking by *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* had itself been debunked. But the debunking of the two magazines drew virtually no public notice. No corrections were run. No one was held accountable. The conventional wisdom about the supposedly bogus October Surprise story stuck.

However, two decades later, I discovered that the two magazines had let the Reagan-Bush campaign off the hook just days after Bush's White House learned that Casey indeed had gone to Madrid. Just as *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* were putting the finishing touches on their stories clearing Casey of having traveled to Madrid, the State Department was informing the White House of the opposite.

State Department legal adviser Edwin D. Williamson told associate White House counsel Chester Paul Beach Jr. that among the State Department "material potentially relevant to the October Surprise allegations [was] a cable from the Madrid embassy indicating that Bill Casey was in town, for purposes unknown," Beach noted in a "memorandum for record" dated November 4, 1991.[\[78\]](#)

In other words, while *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* were making the October Surprise story into a big joke in November 1991, Bush's White House had information that contradicted the smug self-certainty of the two magazines. Not surprisingly, the White House made no effort to clarify the record.

I found Beach's memorandum among about 4,800 pages of documents identified by the George H.W. Bush presidential library as related to the so-called October Surprise controversy and released in 2011. I found no indication that the White House, in 1991, shared the State Department's information with the House task force, which proceeded apace with its determination to put the October Surprise suspicions to rest despite the problem with the London alibi.

Barcella's task force did interview Dallek, who repeated his clear recollection of not finding Casey at the London historical conference on the morning of July 28, 1980. But the task force said nothing publicly that

might embarrass *Newsweek* and *The New Republic*. The task force simply got to work replacing the discredited London alibi with a new one.

In one of those truth-is-stranger-than-fiction moments, Barcella's team decided to construct an alibi for Casey around the Bohemian Grove encampment in northern California where rich and powerful men frolic together in seclusion on three weekends each summer. The House task force placed Casey at the Grove on the last weekend of July 1980 and then had him fly directly from San Francisco to London, arriving on the afternoon of July 28 with no possible stop in Madrid.

However, the problem with Barcella's Bohemian Grove alibi was that all the documentary evidence, including receipts for Casey's purchases and a contemporaneous diary entry by one of the Grove members who shared the Parsonage camp with Casey, indicated that Casey went to the Grove on the first weekend of August, not the last weekend of July.[\[111\]](#) The task force even obtained a group photograph of the members and guests at the Parsonage on the last weekend of July and Casey wasn't there.[\[79\]](#)

But the House investigators were determined to create this new alibi for Casey. They went so far as to throw out the documentary evidence of Casey's attendance in August, claiming that they had trumped that evidence with a notation by Reagan's foreign policy adviser Richard Allen who had written down Casey's home phone number on August 2, 1980.[\[80\]](#) That act of writing down Casey's home number proved, the House investigators said, that Casey must have been at home and therefore not at the Bohemian Grove the first weekend of August. Ergo, the only alternative date would have been the last weekend in July and – presto! – the new alibi was created.

However, in a world where logic actually plays a role, it wouldn't follow that just writing down a person's home number means that the person is at home, especially since Allen told the investigators that he had no memory or record of reaching Casey at his home.

Another key Casey alibi for another key date relied on the uncorroborated memory of Casey's nephew Larry that his late father had called his brother (Bill Casey) on October 19, 1980, and found him at work at the campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, not in Paris where other witnesses had placed Casey. In 1992, Barcella's investigators deemed Larry Casey's recollection "credible," supposedly proving that Bill Casey had not traveled to Paris.

But Larry Casey's recollection was not "credible." In 1991, a year earlier, I had interviewed Larry Casey for "Frontline" and he offered a completely different alibi for his uncle on that date. Larry Casey insisted that he vividly remembered his parents having dinner with Bill Casey at the Jockey Club in Washington on October 19, 1980. "It was very clear in my mind even though it was 11 years ago," Larry Casey said.

But then I showed Larry Casey the sign-in sheets for the Reagan campaign headquarters. The entries recorded Larry Casey's parents picking up Bill Casey for the dinner on October 15, four days earlier. Larry Casey acknowledged his error, and an American Express receipt later confirmed October 15 as the date of the Jockey Club dinner. In 1992, however, Larry Casey testified before the House task force and offered the substitute "phone call alibi," which he had not mentioned in the "Frontline" interview. Though I notified the House task force about this serious discrepancy, the task force was undeterred. It still used the "phone call alibi" to debunk the Paris allegations.

Chapter Six: Caving In

When George H.W. Bush's presidential library in College Station, Texas, released thousands of pages of records in 2011, the documents made clear that the House task force was under enormous pressure from Bush's White House in 1991-1992 to find any and all excuses to shut down the October Surprise inquiry.

The internal White House documents released by the Bush library revealed that suspicions about Bush's role in various national security scandals were seen as threatening his 1992 reelection prospects. So, Bush's White House staff and Republicans in Congress went into partisan battle mode determined to discredit – not investigate – allegations of Bush's wrongdoing.

The documents show that GOP anger boiled over in 1991 when the long-running Iran-Contra scandal opened the new front, with allegations that secret Republican contacts with Iran extended back to 1980. Republicans were alarmed that Bush might be implicated in a secret – arguably treasonous – deal with Iran that was struck behind President Carter's back when Carter's own reelection in 1980 hinged on whether he could gain freedom for 52 American hostages held by Iranian radicals.

The archived documents, which were released in response to my Freedom of Information Act request, revealed a coordinated strategy between Bush's Executive Branch and congressional Republicans to disrupt, delay and destroy the October Surprise investigation. As assistant White House counsel Ronald Von Lembke put it, the goal was to “kill/spike this story.”[\[81\]](#)

To achieve that desired result, the Republicans coordinated the counter-offensive through the office of White House counsel C. Boyden Gray, under the supervision of associate counsel Janet Rehnquist, the daughter of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

On November 6, 1991, just two days after the State Department had notified associate counsel Beach that William Casey indeed had taken a mysterious trip to Madrid in 1980 “for purposes unknown,” Gray explained the stakes at a White House strategy session. “Whatever form they

ultimately take, the House and Senate ‘October Surprise’ investigations, like Iran-Contra, will involve interagency concerns – and be of special interest to the President,” Gray declared, according to meeting minutes. [Emphasis in original.] Among “touchstones” cited by Gray were “No Surprises to the White House, and Maintain Ability to Respond to Leaks in Real Time. This is Partisan.”[82]

White House “talking points” on the October Surprise investigation urged restricting the inquiry to 1979 and 1980, which would prevent examination of why U.S. military supplies were flowing to Iran via Israel as early as 1981. Gray’s marching orders also sought to impose strict time limits for issuing any findings.

“Alleged facts have to do with 1979-80 – no apparent reason for jurisdiction/subpoena power to extend beyond,” the document said. “There is no sunset provision – this could drag on like Walsh!” – a reference to Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh, whose own investigators had also begun to suspect that the Iran-Contra scandal had its origins in the events of 1980, that the two scandals blended together as one narrative.[83] The overriding impression one gets from examining the released documents is that Reagan-Bush loyalists were determined to thwart any sustained investigative effort that might link the two scandals.

So, as the GOP counterattack unfolded against the October Surprise case, the documents revealed that the strategy included: delaying the production of documents; having a key witness dodge a congressional subpoena; neutralizing an aggressive Democratic investigator (Spencer Oliver); pressuring a Republican senator to become more obstructive; tightly restricting access to classified information; narrowing the inquiry as it applied to alleged Reagan-Bush wrongdoing while simultaneously widening the probe to include Carter’s efforts to free the hostages; mounting a public relations campaign attacking the investigation’s costs; and encouraging friendly journalists to denounce the story.

Ultimately, the GOP cover-up strategy proved highly effective, as Democrats grew timid and neoconservative journalists – then emerging as a powerful force in the Washington media – took the lead in decrying the October Surprise allegations as a “myth.” The Republicans benefited, too, from a Washington press corps, which had grown weary of the complex Iran-Contra scandal. Careerist reporters in the mainstream press had learned

that the route to advancement lay more in “debunking” such complicated national security scandals than in pursuing them.

Yet, despite the cover-up’s success, there were senior Republicans even in 1991 and 1992 who opposed the obstruction strategy, favoring instead a good-faith effort to respond to investigative questions. One of the released documents revealed that Secretary of State James Baker favored quicker production of documents and viewed “the delay/filibuster strategy of the House and Senate Republicans as counterproductive.”[\[84\]](#)

Nevertheless, Bush’s White House stayed in charge of coordinating Republican obstruction of the October Surprise probe, much as it did other related scandals such as the broader Iran-Contra Affair and the Iraqgate scandal.

The White House cover-up also had the advantage of having self-interested parties in key jobs inside the federal government. For instance, on May 14, 1992, a CIA official ran proposed language past associate White House counsel Janet Rehnquist from then-CIA Director Robert Gates regarding the agency’s level of cooperation with Congress. By that point, the CIA, under Gates, was already months into a pattern of foot-dragging on congressional document requests.[\[85\]](#)

In fall 1991, Bush had taken the risk of putting Gates at the CIA’s helm despite strong Senate opposition, but that meant that Gates was well-positioned to stymie congressional requests for sensitive information in the CIA’s vaults about secret initiatives involving Bush. Also protected was one of Bush’s top advisers, Donald Gregg, a CIA veteran who was implicated in Iran-Contra as well as the October Surprise case. As Walsh’s Iran-Contra investigators began to suspect a connection between the two scandals, they asked Gregg in a polygraph exam whether he had participated in the October Surprise operation of 1980. Gregg’s denial was judged to be deceptive.[\[86\]](#)

The Bush presidential records, released in 2011, also revealed that one of the targets of the October Surprise probe was CIA Director Gates himself. On May 26, 1992, task force chairman Hamilton wrote to the CIA asking for records regarding the whereabouts of Gregg and Gates from

January 1, 1980, through January 31, 1981, including travel plans and leaves of absence.

The Bush administration's document delays finally drew a complaint from chief counsel Barcella. He wrote to the CIA on June 9, 1992, that the agency had not been responsive to three requests from September 20, 1991; April 20, 1992; and May 26, 1992. In other words, the CIA under Gates was frustrating a congressional investigation that might have implicated Gates.^[87]

Gregg and Gates also were part of the broader the Iran-Contra scandal. Both were suspected of lying about their knowledge of the 1985-1986 sales of military hardware to Iran and clandestine delivery of weapons to Contra rebels fighting Nicaragua's leftist government. Then-Vice President Bush also had been caught lying in the Iran-Contra scandal when he insisted that a plane, shot down over Nicaragua in 1986 while dropping weapons to the Contras, had no connection to the U.S. government (when the weapons delivery had been organized by operatives close to Bush's vice presidential office who were in regular contact with Gregg, who was then Bush's national security adviser). And, Bush falsely claimed that he was out of the "loop" on Iran-Contra decisions when later evidence showed that he was a key participant in the policy discussions.

From Bush's presidential archives, it was apparent that the October Surprise cover-up was essentially an extension of the broader effort to contain the Iran-Contra scandal, with Bush personally involved in orchestrating both efforts. For instance, Walsh discovered in December 1992 that Bush's White House counsel's office, under Boyden Gray, also had delayed production of Bush's personal notes about the arms shipments to Iran in the 1985-1986 time frame.

Though Gray's office insisted that the delay was unintentional, one of Bush's Iran-Contra diary entries, dated July 20, 1987, described then-Secretary of State George Shultz's detailed notes on meetings with Reagan. In the Iran-Contra report, Walsh wrote that Bush's phrasing about Shultz's notes suggested that the withholding of Bush's own documents was willful.

"I found this almost inconceivable," Bush wrote about Shultz. "Not only that he kept the notes, but that he'd turned them all over to Congress. ... I would never do it. I would never surrender such documents."^[88]

Following those sentiments, Bush's White House sought to frustrate not just Iran-Contra investigators but those assigned to examine the October

Surprise issue. Rather than any commitment to openness regarding the October Surprise case, the documents revealed a cat-and-mouse game designed to frustrate any serious pursuit of the truth. Beyond dragging its heels on producing documents, the Bush administration maneuvered to keep key witnesses out of timely reach of the investigators.

For instance, Gregg used his stationing as U.S. Ambassador to South Korea in 1992 to evade a congressional subpoena. When it came to answering questions from Congress about the October Surprise matter, Gregg found excuses not to accept service of a subpoena.

In a June 18, 1992, cable from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul to the State Department in Washington, Gregg wrote that he had learned that Senate investigators had “attempted to subpoena me to appear on 24 June in connection with their so-called ‘October Surprise’ investigation. The subpoena was sent to my lawyer, Judah Best, who returned it to the committee since he had no authority to accept service of a subpoena. ...

“If the October Surprise investigation contacts the [State] Department, I request that you tell them of my intention to cooperate fully when I return to the States, probably in September. Any other inquiries should be referred to my lawyer, Judah Best. Mr. Best asks that I specifically request you not to accept service of a subpoena if the committee attempts to deliver one to you.”[\[89\]](#)

That way Gregg ensured that he was not legally compelled to testify, while running out the clock on the under-funded Senate inquiry and leaving little time for the House task force.

Gregg’s strategy of delay was endorsed by associate White House counsel Janet Rehnquist after a meeting with Judah Best and a State Department lawyer. In a June 24, 1992, letter to Gray, Rehnquist wrote that “at your direction, I have looked into whether Don Gregg should return to Washington to testify before the Senate Subcommittee hearings next week. ... I believe we should NOT request that Gregg testify next week.”[\[90\]](#)

The failure to effect service of the subpoena gave the Bush team an advantage, Rehnquist noted, because the Senate investigators then relented and merely “submitted written questions to Gregg, through counsel, in lieu of an appearance. ... This development provides us an opportunity to manage Gregg’s participation in October Surprise long distance.” Rehnquist added, hopefully, that by the end of September 1992 “the issue may, by that time, even be dead for all practical purposes.”

Beyond pushing the investigation later into 1992, the Republican delaying tactics ensured that an interim House report, scheduled for the end of June, would not break any new ground that might damage Bush's reelection hopes. Meanwhile, the GOP made it a top priority to have the interim report clear Bush of allegations that he had joined a secret trip to Paris in mid-October 1980 to meet with Iranian representatives, the documents showed.

Bush himself had angrily demanded at two news conferences that Congress clear him of the allegations that he had taken a secret trip to Paris in 1980. But the Bush administration continued to refuse to release the identity of potential alibi witnesses who might have been with Bush during the morning and early afternoon of October 19, 1980, a key time frame to prove that Bush could not have made a quick overnight flight to Paris for an alleged meeting with Iranians.

On June 24, 1992, Rehnquist prepared "talking points" for a Boyden Gray phone call with Republican Sens. Jim Jeffords of Vermont and Richard Lugar of Indiana stressing that "it must be said clearly for the record" that Bush was not in Paris. "We cannot let something this important left hanging," Rehnquist wrote.[\[91\]](#)

The key to that success was to prevent the congressional investigators from thoroughly examining Bush's supposed alibis for the dates of October 18-19, 1980, when his account had him returning to his home in Washington on the evening of October 18 and relaxing in Washington the next morning and afternoon. However, some October Surprise witnesses, including Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe, alleged that Bush had really snuck off for an overnight flight to Paris to meet with Iranians.

The new records revealed that the White House had a hand in limiting what the Secret Service released to the investigators regarding Bush's supposed activities during the day of October 19. The partially redacted Secret Service records, which were given to Congress, showed a morning trip to the Chevy Chase Country Club and an afternoon visit to a private residence. But the redactions impeded efforts by congressional investigators to corroborate that those supposed movements by Bush actually took place.

When redacted Secret Service records were first released in the early 1990s, Bush's supposed visit to the Chevy Chase club that morning had

been cited as slam-dunk evidence that Bush couldn't have gone to Paris. Relying on Republican sources, friendly journalists also reported that Bush had been playing tennis at the club. But the tennis alibi collapsed when it was discovered that rain had prevented tennis that morning.

Then, Secret Service supervisor Leonard "Buck" Tanis, a Bush favorite from his detail, came forward with another story, that Bush and his wife Barbara had brunch at the club with Justice and Mrs. Potter Stewart. By 1992, however, Justice Stewart was dead and Republicans claimed that Mrs. Stewart was in poor health, suffering from senility and unavailable to be interviewed.

So, it seemed Tanis's recollection would have to stand unchallenged. However, I learned that reports of Mrs. Stewart's physical and mental decline were greatly exaggerated. She was going out with a retired CIA official whom I knew. When I called her, she was quite lucid and told me that she and her husband never had brunch with the Bushes at the Chevy Chase club.

Using the Freedom of Information Act, I also obtained redacted reports from Barbara Bush's Secret Service detail and they showed her going to the C&O jogging path that morning, not to the Chevy Chase club. When I passed on this information to congressional investigators, they interviewed Tanis again – and he backed away from his story of the brunch. He joined the other Secret Service agents in saying he had no specific recollection of Bush's travels that day.

Regarding the afternoon trip to a private residence, the Bush library records revealed that Bush's White House was involved in keeping the name of Bush's host secret. At the same time, Republican operatives were putting pressure on a key Republican senator involved in the October Surprise inquiry to act more aggressively in Bush's defense.

On June 24, 1992, Janet Rehnquist wrote a memo for the file describing a meeting that she and Gray had with Sen. Terry Sanford, D-North Carolina, chairman of the subcommittee in charge of the Senate's October Surprise inquiry, and Jeffords, the ranking Republican.

The senators complained about the "GOP thrashing Jeffords" over his cooperation with the October Surprise investigation, Rehnquist wrote. "The Senators urged that we seek to stop the GOP from criticizing Sen. Jeffords' handling of the minority interests in the investigation. They said that they were irritated by the continued GOP bashing and that it wasn't doing any

good.”^[92] But the pummeling appeared to have softened Jeffords’s readiness to ask tough questions.

Rehnquist wrote, with apparent relief, that there was “discussion concerning whether the investigators needed to see the names and addresses of private individuals whom the VP visited on a particular occasion” and the two senators “were not interested in the names and addresses of private individuals whom the VP may have visited on a particular day.” So, the White House was spared publicly having to identify Bush’s alibi witness for the afternoon of October 19, 1980.

In summer 1992, other Republicans were suggesting that they wanted to protect the host’s name because Bush may have been visiting a woman friend and that the Democrats might have been hoping to stir up a sex scandal to counter some of the salacious rumors about their own nominee, Bill Clinton. However, when the partially redacted Secret Service records for Barbara Bush were released they showed her going to the same unidentified residence, deflating suggestions of a sexual liaison involving her husband.

The question that remained was whether George H.W. Bush actually was part of the afternoon visit or whether his wife’s day trip was used as a cover for his absence from Washington. Without questioning the afternoon host, it was impossible to verify Bush’s alibi.

However, in one of the many strange alibi deals that pervaded the October Surprise investigation, Rep. Hamilton and the House task force agreed to clear Bush of taking a secret trip to Paris in exchange for the White House privately giving the name of Bush’s host to a small number of the congressional investigators. But they were barred from interviewing the alibi witness or releasing the name. The peculiar arrangement – being told the name of an alibi witness but never questioning the witness – was typical of Bush’s White House imposing bizarre rules on the inquiry and the badgered investigators acquiescing.

The House task force stuck with its decision to clear Bush regarding the alleged Paris trip despite subsequent evidence suggesting that Bush, indeed, had flown to Paris and had created a false record to conceal the trip. For instance, I informed the task force about contemporaneous knowledge of the Bush-to-Paris trip provided by *Chicago Tribune* reporter John Maclean, son of author Norman Maclean who wrote *A River Runs Through It*. John Maclean said a well-placed Republican source told him in mid-

October 1980 about Bush taking a secret trip to Paris to meet with Iranians on the U.S. hostage issue.

After hearing this news in 1980, Maclean passed on the information to David Henderson, a State Department Foreign Service officer. Henderson recalled the date as October 18, 1980, when the two met at Henderson's Washington home to discuss another matter. For his part, Maclean never wrote about the Bush-to-Paris leak because, he told me later, a Reagan campaign spokesman officially denied it. As the years passed, the memory of the leak faded for both Henderson and Maclean, until the October Surprise story bubbled to the surface in the early 1990s.

Henderson mentioned the meeting in a 1991 letter to a U.S. senator that was forwarded to me. Maclean confirmed that he had received the Republican leak, though he was not eager to become part of the October Surprise story in 1991. He also agreed with Henderson's recollection that their conversation occurred on or about October 18, 1980. But Maclean still refused to identify his source.

The significance of the Maclean-Henderson conversation was that it was a piece of information locked in a kind of historical amber, untainted by later claims and counter-claims about the October Surprise dispute. One could not accuse Maclean of concocting the Bush-to-Paris allegation for some ulterior motive, since he hadn't used it in 1980, nor had he volunteered it a decade later. He only confirmed it when asked – and did so reluctantly.

And, there was other support for the allegations of a Republican-Iranian meeting in Paris. David Andelman, the biographer for French intelligence chief, Count Alexandre deMarenches, who served as head of France's Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionage (SDECE), testified to the House task force that deMarenches told him that he had helped the Reagan-Bush campaign arrange meetings with Iranians on the hostage issue in summer and fall of 1980, with one meeting in Paris in October. Andelman said deMarenches insisted that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoir because the story could damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush.

The allegations of a Paris meeting also received support from several other sources, including pilot Heinrich Rupp, who said he flew Casey from Washington's National Airport to Paris on a flight that left very late on a rainy night in mid-October 1980. Rupp said that after arriving at LeBourget

airport outside Paris, he saw a man resembling Bush on the tarmac. The night of October 18 indeed was rainy in the Washington area. And, sign-in sheets at the Reagan-Bush headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, placed Casey within a five-minute drive of National Airport late that evening.

There were other bits and pieces of corroboration about the Paris meetings. A French arms dealer, Nicholas Ignatiev, told me in 1990 that he had checked with his government contacts and was told that Republicans did meet with Iranians in Paris in mid-October 1980. A well-connected French investigative reporter Claude Angeli said his sources inside the French secret service confirmed that the service provided “cover” for a meeting between Republicans and Iranians in France on the weekend of October 18-19. German journalist Martin Kilian had received a similar account from a top aide to intelligence chief deMarenches.

As early as 1987, Iran’s ex-President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr had made similar claims about a Paris meeting, and Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe claimed to have been present outside the meeting and saw Bush, Casey, Gates and Gregg among those in attendance. Finally, there was the Russian government report sent to task force chairman Hamilton (though apparently never given to him), saying that Soviet-era intelligence files contained information about Republicans holding a series of meetings with Iranians in Europe, including one in Paris in October 1980.

“William Casey, in 1980, met three times with representatives of the Iranian leadership,” the Russian Report said. “The meetings took place in Madrid and Paris.” At the Paris meeting in October 1980, “R[obert] Gates, at that time a staffer of the National Security Council in the administration of Jimmy Carter, and former CIA Director George Bush also took part,” the report said.

“The representatives of Ronald Reagan and the Iranian leadership discussed the question of possibly delaying the release of 52 hostages from the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran.”[[1111](#)]

So, the identity of Bush’s alibi witness on early Sunday afternoon, October 19, would seem to be an important fact to nail down – and interviewing the witness could have gone a long way toward dismissing or confirming the October Surprise allegations at least in regard to Bush. However, the Bush

administration refused to release the Secret Service records that might shed light on the identity of the alibi witness. That stonewall remained in place until 2011 when I appealed to the National Archives, which has jurisdiction over presidential libraries.

My appeal was directed at Secret Service records that I had found in the files of Bush's White House counsel Boyden Gray.[\[93\]](#) I argued that the excuse used for keeping the location of Bush's purported visit secret – that releasing it might somehow jeopardize the safety of Secret Service officers and their protectees – was absurd, since all I wanted was the address where Bush's detail would have gone three decades ago. After weighing my appeal – and getting permission from ex-President Bush – the National Archives finally agreed that the address could be released.

With the white-out finally lifted, I could see that Bush's Secret Service detail left the Bush family home at 4429 Lowell Street N.W., Washington, D.C., at 1:35 p.m. on October 19, 1980, and arrived at "Moore Residence, 4917 Rockwood Pkwy." at 1:40 p.m. By checking Washington D.C. real estate records, I discovered that the owner of the house at 4917 Rockwood Parkway in 1980 was Richard A. Moore.

Moore was a longtime Bush family friend but he was best known for his role in the Watergate scandal when he served as a special counsel to President Richard Nixon. Though Richard A. Moore was not one of the household names from the Watergate cover-up, a review of literature on the scandal reveals that he was a trusted aide to Nixon and helped formulate both legal and public-relations strategies to fend off the Watergate investigations.

In *The Haldeman Diaries*, White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman described Nixon frequently sending his top aides to consult with Moore about developments in the scandal. At one point, as White House counsel Dean was breaking from the cover-up and starting to talk with prosecutors, Haldeman noted that "Moore was very close to Dean, how about having him talk with Dean and see what he has in mind."

In Dean's *Blind Ambition*, Dean credited Moore with first coming up with the memorable phrase that the Watergate cover-up was becoming "a cancer" on Nixon's presidency, a metaphor that Dean used in a key Oval Office confrontation with Nixon and repeated during the Watergate hearings. During those hearings, Moore was dispatched by the White House to dispute Dean's assertion that Nixon was complicit in the cover-up of the

June 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters at least as early as that September.

On July 12, 1973, Moore told the Senate Watergate Committee that “nothing said in my meetings with Mr. Dean or my meetings with the President suggests in any way that before March 21 [1973] the President had known, or that Mr. Dean believed he had known, of any involvement of White House personnel in the bugging or the cover-up.”

Perhaps because of his status as a lawyer to Nixon, Moore escaped the fate of many other White House insiders who were indicted and prosecuted for false testimony and obstruction of justice. Being a Yale alumnus and a friend of the well-connected George H.W. Bush, who was then chairman of the Republican National Committee, probably didn't hurt either. Moore somehow managed to escape indictment for his Watergate role, even though he sometimes was at meetings where everyone else ended up going to jail.

In 1980, Moore and his wife, Jane Swift Moore, were living in an exclusive tree-lined neighborhood in Northwest Washington about one mile from the home of George H.W. and Barbara Bush. When I contacted one of Moore's sons, Richard A. Moore Jr., he told me that the Bushes were “almost neighbors,” often popping in.

Moore's career also was indebted to Bush. In September 1989, President George H.W. Bush lifted Moore from his Watergate purgatory and named him Ambassador to Ireland. So, in the early 1990s, when Bush's White House was trying to stop the October Surprise investigation and demanding that Bush be cleared of suspicion that he had flown to Paris, Moore was a public figure and in a Senate-confirmed office that would have required him to cooperate with a congressional investigation. Moore served in Dublin until June 1992, departing the same month as the battle over withholding his identity was playing out behind closed doors in Washington.

Further, Moore presumably would have been inclined to help both his boss and his friend if he could. However, when investigators were trying to determine whether Bush had traveled to Paris — and were looking for evidence to prove that he hadn't — the Bush administration whited-out Moore's address before releasing redacted versions of the Secret Service records. Administration officials then agreed to tell Hamilton and a few other investigators the identity of Bush's afternoon host only on condition that the person not be interviewed.

So, the question remained: If Richard A. Moore could have confirmed that Bush was definitely in Washington on October 19, 1980, not on a secret mission to Paris, why wasn't he questioned? Why was the Bush administration so determined to block the House task force from interviewing Moore? It would seem to have been in Bush's interests to have released this information to investigators and allowed them to talk with Moore. That is, if Moore would have confirmed that Bush dropped by that day.

Conversely, it would have been disastrous for Bush if he had allowed Moore to be interviewed and Moore – remembering how close he came to getting indicted in Watergate – had told investigators that Bush wasn't there. Though the October 19, 1980, visit could have involved either Moore or his wife, or both, the “alibi witness” being kept secret in 1992 had to be Moore, since his wife, Jane Swift Moore, had died in 1985.

By the time that the information necessary to identify Moore was released in 2011 – with former President Bush's belated approval – Moore was dead, too, succumbing to prostate cancer on January 27, 1995. So, if George H.W. Bush's purpose in delaying release of Moore's identity had been to ensure that no one could check with Moore about Bush's alibi for October 19, 1980, Bush had achieved his goal. Certainly, by keeping Moore's identity secret until after his death, Bush made it impossible for Moore to weigh in on the validity of Bush's October Surprise alibi.

Another document released to me under my appeal to the National Archives raised further suspicions about Bush's whereabouts on that Sunday. Undated handwritten notes that I found in the files of one of White House counsel Gray's assistants, Ronald Von Lembke, indicated that some of the Secret Service records for October 19, 1980, were missing. For that date, the notes stated, “*NO Residence Report. *0000 [midnight] – 0800 – missing. 0800-1600 – okay. *1600-2400 – missing.”[\[94\]](#) Asterisks were used to highlight the references to missing material.

Written in the margin, next to the time references is the name “Potter Stewart,” the late Supreme Court Justice who was another Bush family friend. The reference implied that the White House counsel's office was checking on how to bolster Bush's alibi for October 19, 1980. The same notes included a check mark next to the name “Buck Tanis,” suggesting that the author of the notes had contacted Secret Service supervisor Leonard “Buck” Tanis, the Bush favorite from his Secret Service detail and the

supervisor on October 19, 1980, who was the only agent claiming to recall another dubious part of Bush's alibi, the morning trip to the Chevy Chase Country Club.

The handwritten notes suggested that, at minimum, an official from Bush's counsel's office discussed the Potter Stewart alibi with Tanis, thus raising questions about whether Tanis's initial testimony about the alleged brunch with Justice and Mrs. Stewart, an alibi which later proved false and which Tanis later recanted, had been suggested or otherwise influenced by a White House lawyer.

In 1992, all the confusion and obfuscation over Bush's strange alibis piqued the suspicions of Spencer Oliver. In a six-page memo, Oliver urged a closer look at Bush's whereabouts and questioned why the Secret Service was concealing the name of the alibi witness for the afternoon trip. "Why did the Secret Service refuse to cooperate on a matter which could have conclusively cleared George Bush of these serious allegations?" Oliver asked. "Was the White House involved in this refusal? Did they order it?"[\[95\]](#)

Oliver also noted Bush's odd behavior in raising the October Surprise issue on his own at two news conferences. "It can be fairly said that President Bush's recent outbursts about the October Surprise inquiries and [about] his whereabouts in mid-October of 1980 are disingenuous at best," wrote Oliver, "since the administration has refused to make available the documents and the witnesses that could finally and conclusively clear Mr. Bush."

From the White House documents released in 2011, it was clear that Oliver's suspicions were well-founded regarding the involvement of Bush's White House staff in the decision to conceal the name of his supposed afternoon host.

Keeping the tough-minded Oliver off the October Surprise investigation also became a high priority for the Republicans. At a midway point in the inquiry when some Democratic task force members asked Oliver to represent them as a staff investigator, Republicans threatened a boycott unless Oliver was barred. In another curious gesture of bipartisanship, Hamilton gave the Republicans the power to veto Oliver's

participation. Thus denied one of the few Democratic investigators with both the savvy and courage to pursue a serious inquiry, the Democratic members of the task force retreated.

The documents from the Bush library shed some additional light on how far the Republicans were prepared to go to protect Bush on the issue of his whereabouts on October 19, 1980. One of the released documents also reflected how angry the Republicans were about Oliver, who had been a dogged investigator during the congressional Iran-Contra probe in 1987. He was hated, too, for asking touchy questions about Iraqgate and the October Surprise issue in 1991-1992.

Thomas Smeeton, a former CIA officer who served as Republican staff director for the House Intelligence Committee and had been Rep. Dick Cheney's appointee to the congressional Iran-Contra investigation, sent Janet Rehnquist a memorandum prepared for Republican members regarding Oliver, entitled "October Surprise – The Ubiquitous Spencer Oliver." The memo said Republicans had "been told repeatedly that Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman [Dante] Fascell does not want his Chief Counsel, Spencer Oliver, to participate in the 'October Surprise' probe. Yet, we continue to get reports that he's as active as ever. For example, the GAO [General Accounting Office], in congressional testimony last year [1991] indicated that he attended an October Surprise meeting with Senator Terry Sanford."[\[96\]](#)

Meanwhile, Bush's White House kept up the pressure to restrict congressional access to key documents pertinent to the investigation. In a "top secret" memo dated June 26, 1992, to the State Department about cooperation with the October Surprise probe, National Security Council executive secretary William F. Sittmann demanded "special treatment" for NSC documents related to presidential deliberations.

Regarding the House task force, Sittmann recommended that only Republican counsel Richard Leon and Democratic counsel Barcella be "permitted to read relevant portions of the documents and to take notes, but that the State Department retain custody of the documents and the notes at all times."[\[97\]](#)

Though Republicans kept insisting that the October Surprise allegations were a myth, the Bush administration was going to extraordinary lengths to control the evidence. Beyond restricting access to documents, the White House staff and Capitol Hill Republicans sought to

limit the inquiry's scope as it related to the Reagan-Bush campaign while expanding it to include President Carter's own hostage negotiations. Then, the GOP organized a press campaign to attack the overall cost of the investigation.

In White House counsel Gray's inter-agency meeting, Gray instructed administration officials to keep track of the costs for document searches so the inquiry could be called a waste of money.[\[98\]](#)

The documents also revealed close collaboration between Janet Rehnquist's office and Republican congressional staff, especially John Mackey, the minority staff director on the House October Surprise task force. When another Bush legal adviser, Lee Liberman, helped coordinate a P.R. attack on the cost of the October Surprise inquiry, Mackey sent his business card with the note, "Lee: FYI How to hit back! Best, John."[\[99\]](#)

Bush's White House also kept close track of press stories, especially those tearing down the credibility of anyone who made October Surprise allegations. That was especially true about Carter's former NSC aide Gary Sick, whose *New York Times* op-ed in April 1991 had given important impetus to the long-held suspicions regarding a 1980 GOP-Iranian deal.

On May 21, 1991, President Bush dashed off a personal note to conservative columnist William Rusher, thanking him for "rallying 'round in that article challenging Gary Sick to apologize. I doubt it will happen."[\[100\]](#)

However, at least one White House official privately held a different view of Sick's book, *October Surprise*, which elaborated on the evidence in support of believing that an October Surprise deal was struck between the Republicans and the Iranians in 1980. On June 23, 1992, after reading the book, Ash Jain wrote a memo to Janet Rehnquist, noting that "Sick presents a seemingly compelling account of [William] Casey's participation in secret meetings with the Iranian Government."[\[888\]](#)

While George H.W. Bush's White House was busy tying up and shutting down the October Surprise investigation in Congress, former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe was facing his own political pressures back in Australia.

As journalist Marshall Wilson reported, Labor MP Michael Danby picked up the theme that Ben-Menashe was only “a low-level translator” unworthy of serious consideration. Danby was a former editor of the *Australia/Israel Review*, who in 2011 was revealed by *WikiLeaks* as having been among a clutch of political informers to the U.S. Embassy in Canberra.

Some of Ben-Menashe’s allegations also noted corruption within the Australian Labor Party, creating more incentives for Australian officials to coordinate with their American allies in finding a way to put the troublesome Israeli back on the run. On October 23, 1991, Ben-Menashe was informed that his refugee application had failed, Wilson reported, citing documents he obtained under Australia’s Freedom of Information laws. [\[101\]](#)

A departmental officer declared that “there appears to have been ample opportunity for one government or another [the U.S. or Israel] to have taken action against Mr Ben-Menashe if his political importance made him of real interest to them. Consequently I do not accept that the applicant has been effectively rendered stateless or that he is in a life-threatening situation.”

Ben-Menashe appealed the finding, but on December 12, 1991, the Refugee Status Review Committee confirmed the adverse ruling. A letter signed by its Chairman said in part: “The applicant’s fear of the consequences of breaking Israeli law does not warrant international protection under the Convention. The applicant has, therefore, not established a well-founded fear of persecution were he to return to Israel.” [\[102\]](#)

On December 28, 1991, Australian officials took steps to revoke Ben-Menashe’s multiple-entry permit. With his temporary visa due to expire, Ben-Menashe was thus effectively prevented from returning to Australia should he leave to provide further testimony to the U.S. Congress. This time, Ben-Menashe appealed not to the Immigration department but to the Federal Court in New South Wales on grounds that the revocation was a breach of natural justice.

The court agreed and ordered Immigration authorities to file an affidavit by January 22, 1992, identifying the relevant decision-maker and the material on which the decision was based. [\[103\]](#) Unwilling to provide more details, Immigration authorities offered Ben-Menashe a deal. On January 20, 1992, the Immigration department agreed to extend Ben-

Menashe's visa allowing him to stay in Australia until April 18, 1992. But Immigration authorities then played their trump card by alerting Ben-Menashe that, since his application for refugee status had been denied and he was no longer a *bona fide* visitor, his tourist visa would expire on that date.

In the end Ben-Menashe left Australia without further resort to the courts. He departed shortly after a state visit to Australia by President George H.W. Bush, who gave a first-ever address to the Australian Parliament by a U.S. president.

Even as Ben-Menashe was chased out of Australia and made to scramble to find another temporary home, his credibility gained additional support. Journalist Craig Unger, the dissenter inside *Newsweek's* October Surprise debunking, was told by a senior Israeli intelligence official, Moshe Hebroni, that "Ben-Menashe served directly under me. ... He had access to very, very sensitive material," according to an article Unger wrote for *The Village Voice*.[\[104\]](#)

In the Israeli daily, *Davar*, reporter Pazit Ravina wrote, "in talks with people who worked with Ben-Menashe, the claim that he had access to highly sensitive intelligence information was confirmed again and again."

But such corroboration did little to help Ben-Menashe's status inside Official Washington. In late June 1992, when the House task force acquiesced to George H.W. Bush's insistence on being cleared of the suspicions about the Paris trip, the corollary was that Ben-Menashe must be a liar since he had testified to the task force under oath that he had seen Bush in Paris.

Eventually, Ben-Menashe settled in Montreal where he married a Canadian woman and was granted Canadian citizenship. To this day he insists that his accounts about covert U.S.-Israeli operations with Iran were true.

Chapter Seven: CIA Within the CIA

If the October Surprise case had just been a matter of Republicans playing a dirty trick on Democrats – like a real-life version of “Spy vs. Spy” in the old *MAD* magazines – solving the mystery would have been difficult enough. After all, by 1992-1993, a pattern had been set in which the Democrats shied away from the hard and unpleasant work of holding the Republicans accountable.

In 1968, when President Lyndon Johnson was considering blowing the whistle on the Nixon campaign’s sabotage of the Vietnam peace talks, voices of caution were raised by the likes of Defense Secretary Clark Clifford that full disclosure wouldn’t be “good for the country.” It was true that Democrats showed more spunk during the Watergate scandal, although even then prominent Democratic leaders like DNC Chairman Robert Strauss urged the party to sweep the dirty business under the rug so the country could move on.

In the spirit of Clifford and Strauss, Establishment Democrats, such as Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana and Sen. David Boren of Oklahoma, went soft on the next generation of Republican scandals, including President Reagan’s Iran-Contra Affair. It was easier to put the blame on a few underlings and pretend that Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were simply inattentive to details. There was little stomach, too, for digging into the ugly Iraqgate business, the Reagan administration’s secret assistance to Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein.

So, even if the Democrats only had to face down Republicans over what really happened in the October Surprise case, chances were the Democrats would have taken a dive for what they would call the “good of the country.” But the October Surprise case involved other suspects who wielded their own clout in the power centers of Washington.

Obviously, the Israeli government was one. Americans might not take kindly to the idea of another government intervening to rig an American presidential election. That could shatter the longstanding narrative of little Israel standing bravely in the Middle East as a champion of America’s democratic principles. At such a moment of risk for Israel’s image, one

could expect its many friends in the United States to do whatever they could to protect the “plucky ally” storyline.

Then, there was what may have been an even more troubling part of the October Surprise scenario, that key Establishment figures participated in or blessed a secret strategy for removing Jimmy Carter and replacing him with someone more to their liking. In this case, it was the personable Ronald Reagan backed up by one of their own, George H.W. Bush, whose family background on Wall Street and whose personal work in the oil business, as well as his year as head of the Central Intelligence Agency, put him in position to know exactly the right people to pull such a maneuver off.

Other characters in the mystery even connected back to the Republican caper in 1968 to sink the Vietnam peace talks, including Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon himself. It was Kissinger, who – while serving as a peace-talk adviser to the Johnson administration – helped make the obstruction of the peace talks possible by secretly briefing people working for Nixon, according to Seymour Hersh’s 1983 book, *The Price of Power*.

“It is certain,” Hersh wrote, “that the Nixon campaign, alerted by Kissinger to the impending success of the peace talks, was able to get a series of messages to the Thieu government [in Saigon] making it clear that a Nixon presidency would have different views on the peace negotiations.”

Kissinger’s subsequent appointment as President Nixon’s national security adviser gave Kissinger access to the inner sanctum of Washington power, adding to his existing contacts in academia, through Harvard, and into the financial world, through his ties to the Rockefellers. He could open doors to Wall Street boardrooms and swing wide gateways into elite academic circles. Kissinger also quickly learned to play the Washington power game, feeding reporters juicy morsels of information and amusing attendees at Georgetown parties with his clever repartee.

Yet, even as Kissinger ingratiated himself to the Washington Establishment in the late 1960s and early 1970s, part of the price for Kissinger’s power was that he was forced to listen as Nixon brooded over his “enemies list” and profanely denounced the Jews who Nixon thought had it in for him. On Nixon’s White House tapes, Kissinger, himself a Jew, can be heard demurring to Nixon’s anti-Semitic rages.

Even after leaving office in 1977 as President Gerald Ford’s Secretary of State, Kissinger remained a valued guest at the homes of the Georgetown

elite, the likes of Katharine Graham, the publisher of *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*. When I worked as a *Newsweek* correspondent in the late 1980s, I was surprised at the influence Kissinger wielded inside the magazine, which regularly published his columns, famous for their density and convoluted writing style.

Once I was told by a *Newsweek* editor who was “late-gating” the magazine – giving it a final read-through before it went to press – that he got to Kissinger’s column and discovered that some sentences lacked verbs. So the “late-gating” editor called the editor who was responsible for handling Kissinger’s column and got the surprised reaction, “You mean you actually read it?”

On another occasion, I was working late at night in 1989, when foreign policy correspondent Doug Waller came by my windowless office. He had been working on a story about the Tiananmen Square massacre and had been stunned to get a phone call from Henry Kissinger. At the time, Kissinger was promoting lucrative business ventures with the Chinese communist government and was trying to fend off some of the worst publicity from the massacre, which claimed the lives of an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 pro-democracy protesters.

Waller told me that Kissinger didn’t want *Newsweek* to use the phrase “Tiananmen Square massacre” because Kissinger was claiming that none of the protesters had actually died in Tiananmen Square. I suggested to Waller, “perhaps we can make Henry happy by calling it the ‘round and about Tiananmen Square massacre.’”

Though Kissinger did not prevail in getting his way about blocking the phrase “Tiananmen Square massacre,” his high-handed behavior with working journalists suggested that he understood his clout with Mrs. Graham and other top *Newsweek* executives. He could throw his weight around with their subordinates.

Over the last half of the 20 Century, Kissinger had come to personify the three-way intersection of moneyed interests, the media and politics. Especially with his ties to prominent international banker David Rockefeller, Kissinger was one of those influential figures who could set the parameters for the Washington debate. Kissinger had become a kind of an *eminence noire*, representing the dark forces of American power.

Kissinger was never far from where the strings were pulled on decisions that pushed the United States in directions favorable to the

Washington/New York elites outside the view of average Americans – and often at the cost of many thousands of lives. The dead were usually the people of some unfortunate country that attracted Washington's displeasure or the U.S. soldiers put in harm's way enforcing Washington's wishes.

The Rockefeller-Kissinger connection to the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981 stemmed from the fact that the Shah of Iran had invested billions of dollars in Chase Manhattan Bank, which meant that his overthrow in February 1979 put the future of the bank in jeopardy if the new Iranian government of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini withdrew the funds – and especially if it did so quickly.

In his autobiography, *Memoirs*, David Rockefeller traced his first direct link to the crisis to March 23, 1979, when late on a Friday afternoon, he and his longtime aide Joseph Verner Reed arrived at a town house in the Beekham Place neighborhood on New York's East Side and were welcomed inside by Iran's Princess Ashraf, the strong-willed twin sister of the Shah who was deeply distressed by the political developments roiling her native country.

In a matter of weeks, the Shah had gone from presiding over an oil-rich regional power in the Middle East to living as a refugee fleeing first to Egypt and then Morocco. Ashraf felt entitled to David Rockefeller's help since billions of dollars in Iranian assets had fattened the bottom line at his Chase Manhattan Bank.

Ashraf was now calling due that debt. She wanted Rockefeller to induce President Carter to grant the Shah, who was suffering from cancer, asylum in the United States. Noting that her brother had a one-week deadline to leave Morocco, she lamented, "My brother has nowhere to go, and no one else to turn to."

Carter had rebuffed appeals to let the Shah enter the United States, fearing that admitting him would endanger the personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. In mid-February 1979, Iranian radicals had overrun the embassy and briefly held the staff hostage, requiring the Iranian government to intervene and secure the release of the Americans.

Carter feared a repeat of the incident amid intense anti-Americanism on the streets of Iran, where the United States was blamed for having the

CIA overthrow an elected nationalist government in 1953 and put the Shah on the Peacock Throne. Over the next quarter century, the Shah used the brutal tactics of his SAVAK secret police to keep his opponents in line.

An Islamic Revolution rose up in early 1979, overwhelming the Shah's security forces and forcing the Shah to flee aboard his private jet. A few days later, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an ascetic religious leader who had been forced into exile by the Shah, returned to a tumultuous welcome from crowds estimated at a million strong, shouting "Death to the Shah."

The new Iranian government began demanding that the Shah be returned to stand trial for human rights crimes and that he surrender his fortune, salted away in overseas accounts. The new Iranian government also wanted Chase Manhattan to return Iranian assets, which Rockefeller put at more than \$1 billion in 1978, although some estimates ran much higher. The withdrawal might have created a liquidity crisis for the bank which already was coping with financial troubles.

After leaving Ashraf's residence on March 23, 1979, Rockefeller attended a dinner with Happy Rockefeller, the widow of his brother Nelson who had died two months earlier. Also at the dinner was Henry Kissinger, who had been a close aide to Nelson Rockefeller dating back to the 1950s when Nelson Rockefeller oversaw Cold War planning for President Dwight Eisenhower. The dinner conversation discussed the dangerous precedent that President Carter was setting by turning his back on a prominent U.S. ally.[\[105\]](#)

The dinner led to a public campaign by Rockefeller – along with Kissinger and former Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman John McCloy – to find a suitable home in exile for the Shah. Trying to shame the Carter administration into letting the Shah into the United States, Kissinger said the former ally had been turned into a modern-day "Flying Dutchman," wandering in search of a safe harbor.

Rockefeller assigned his aide, Joseph Reed, "to help [the Shah] in any way he could," including serving as the Shah's liaison to the U.S. government.[\[106\]](#) McCloy, one of the so-called Wise Men of the post-World War II era who represented Chase Manhattan as an attorney at Milbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy, took on the job of staving off Iran's withdrawal of assets from the bank.

On April 9, 1979, Rockefeller even ended an Oval Office meeting with President Carter by handing him a one-page memo describing how upset

many foreign leaders were with Carter's foreign policy and how he was treating the Shah.

"With virtually no exceptions, the heads of state and other government leaders I saw expressed concern about United States foreign policy which they perceived to be vacillating and lacking in an understandable global approach," Rockefeller's memo read. "They have questions about the dependability of the United States as a friend." An irritated Carter abruptly ended the meeting.[\[107\]](#)

In his *White House Diary*, Carter wrote, "David Rockefeller came in, apparently to induce me to let the shah come to the United States. Rockefeller, Kissinger, and [Carter's own National Security Adviser Zbigniew] Brzezinski seem to be adopting this as a joint project." Brzezinski had worked for Rockefeller in organizing the Trilateral Commission, which was founded in 1973 to encourage closer cooperation among the United States, Europe and Japan.

Carter added, as a later editorial update to his diary, "This [pro-Shah] effort was to develop into a nationwide appeal, and its leaders recruited everyone whom they thought had any influence with me. I still felt, as a matter of caution, that it would be best for the shah to stay in some other country."

Blocked temporarily by President Carter, the Shah's powerful friends sought alternative locations for the Shah, asking other nations to shelter the ex-Iranian ruler. Arrangements were made for the Shah to fly to the Bahamas, but the Bahamian government turned out to be more interested in money than humanitarianism, so the Shah's travels continued to Mexico.

"With the Shah safely settled in Mexico, I had hopes that the need for my direct involvement on his behalf had ended," Rockefeller wrote in *Memoirs*. "Henry [Kissinger] continued to publicly criticize the Carter administration for its overall management of the Iranian crisis and other aspects of its foreign policy, and Jack McCloy bombarded [Carter's Secretary of State] Cyrus Vance with letters demanding the Shah's admission to the United States."

Ultimately, the Shah's deteriorating health would become the factor that convinced Carter to change his mind. He approved the Shah's entrance into the United States for emergency treatment in New York. Celebrating Carter's reversal, Rockefeller's aide Joseph Reed wrote in a memo, "our 'mission impossible' is completed. ... My applause is like thunder."[\[108\]](#)

When the Shah arrived in New York on October 23, 1979, Reed rubbed his victory in by checking the Shah into New York Hospital under the pseudonym, “David Newsome,” a coy reference to Carter’s undersecretary of state for political affairs, David Newsom, who had been an obstacle to the Rockefeller-Kissinger plans.[\[109\]](#)

Much as Carter feared, the admission of the Shah proved disastrous. In Tehran, angry students and Islamist radicals stormed the U.S. Embassy, pressed through clouds of teargas fired by the Marine Guards and seized the buildings. They also grabbed many classified documents (only some of which were shredded), and they captured dozens of American embassy personnel.

For his part, David Rockefeller soon began rewriting the historical narrative to erase his determined campaign for the Shah’s admittance and to shift the blame for the hostage crisis onto Carter and his feckless foreign policy.

“Despite the insistence of journalists and revisionist historians, there was never a ‘Rockefeller-Kissinger behind-the-scenes campaign’ that placed ‘relentless pressure’ on the Carter administration to have the Shah admitted to the United States regardless of the consequences,” Rockefeller wrote in *Memoirs*. “In fact, it would be more accurate to say that for many months we were the unwilling surrogates for a government that had failed to accept its full responsibilities.”

Rockefeller also denied that the goal of his get-the-Shah-into-the-U.S. campaign was to provoke a crisis with Iran, which would, in turn, force President Carter to impose a freeze on Iran’s assets and thus stave off a liquidity crisis for Chase Manhattan, which was still reeling from real-estate losses earlier in the 1970s.

But a 1982 book, *Interlock*, by business writer Mark Hulbert offered a different perspective, citing the many lucrative ties that had existed between the Shah’s Iran and Rockefeller’s business/political circles, both personal and financial.

On the personal side, the Shah’s Ambassador to the United States Ardeshir Zahedi had showered Henry Kissinger with valuable gifts, including caviar, champagne, Persian vodka, an expensive Persian rug for his New York apartment, and a gold goblet and a silver tea set that the Shah sent as a present for Kissinger’s wedding.[\[110\]](#)

More importantly for Chase Manhattan's bottom line, the ouster of the Shah meant that the bank lost the inside track on Iranian transactions, especially oil sales. "Instead of being able to count on a regular deposit flow of about \$15 billion per year, as it did before 1979, Chase had to settle for an unpredictable flow of smaller deposits – a much less lucrative arrangement," Hulbert wrote. "But Chase also faced a more severe threat than losing a portion of the Iranian business: Iran could pull out of Chase altogether."

Such a pull-out could have endangered Chase's viability, in part, because the bank had extensive loans to Iran which the new government could have reneged on by citing the Shah's failure to abide by a constitutional requirement of parliamentary approval for all international loans, according to Hulbert.

"As agent for the syndicates of banks that had extended the questionable loans, Chase was most responsible for insuring, among other things, the legal enforceability of each of the loans," Hulbert wrote. "In the event a court found that these loans were not enforceable, therefore, Chase not only would have faced potential losses to the extent of its own participation in each of these syndicated loans but, in addition, lawsuits from each of the other banks that also lost money. ...

"Chase faced legal problems with its Iranian loans for yet another reason – due to the possibility that some of its loans went to the Shah personally. ... The line separating the accounts of the Iranian government and those of the Shah and the Pahlavi Foundation was frequently blurred. And many in the new Iranian government were claiming that the intended beneficiaries of various bank loans had never received the amounts – and therefore that the new regime had no obligation to repay the loans."

If the revolutionary government of Iran had succeeded in extracting all its assets from Chase, the bank might have found itself without the funds to cover such loan defaults, Hulbert explained. Thus, Rockefeller's team understood the potential value of a U.S. government freeze on Iranian assets. Hulbert noted that the bank's lawyer, John McCloy, who was already working on pressuring President Carter to admit the Shah, was responsible for devising a legal strategy for Chase to declare the Iranian government in default on the loans and thus seize any available Iranian assets, even those not directly tied to the government.

Hulbert reported that the Carter administration had begun formulating contingency plans for freezing Iranian assets as early as February 1979. But there still needed to be an emergency to justify such drastic action, a point that Chase officials understood as Rockefeller's team stepped up pressure on President Carter to let the Shah in.

"The Shah's presence in the U.S. led to just the sort of political climate in which a national emergency could be declared," Hulbert wrote. He added, both Rockefeller and Kissinger knew that their public-private campaign to get the Shah admitted would likely lead to the U.S. Embassy being overrun and its personnel taken hostage.

"The record shows that both men were aware from an early date that the Shah's presence in the U.S. would very likely lead to an assault on the embassy," Hulbert wrote. "Despite this knowledge, Rockefeller and Kissinger continued to lobby strongly for admitting the Shah."

Of course, exactly what Rockefeller and Kissinger knew and what they intended can never be precisely known. But their success in browbeating President Carter into allowing the Shah's admittance to the United States does have the look of a brilliant billiard shot, whether intentional or not, creating a pretext for freezing Iranian assets inside Chase Manhattan's vaults, making Carter look weak and ineffectual, and ultimately driving him from office.

Carter had other powerful enemies inside Washington who were eager to see him gone, especially across the Potomac River at the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Carter's CIA director, Stansfield Turner, had purged many of the Old Boys who saw themselves as protectors of America's deepest national interests.

The humiliation in Iran in 1979-1980 resonated with special pain for some of the CIA's Old Boys who had helped restore the Shah to the Peacock Throne in Iran, one of the agency's early successes in 1953. To see that achievement now reversed hurt the CIA's institutional pride and embittered some of the aging participants in that covert operation.

In 1979, key veterans of the Iranian coup were still alive. Archibald Roosevelt, one of the Old Boys from the Iranian operation, had moved on to become an adviser to David Rockefeller at Chase Manhattan Bank. Another

was Miles Copeland, who had served the CIA as an intermediary to Arab leaders, including Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser. Copeland also had helped in the Iran operation.

In his autobiography, *The Game Player*, Copeland wrote that the lingering crisis over the hostages led him and his CIA chums to dream up their own strategy for resolving the Iranian hostage crisis. After all, Copeland claimed, he and his colleagues were part of “the CIA within the CIA,” a special group of patriots who understood America’s vital national interests and would do what was necessary to protect those interests.

When I interviewed Copeland in 1990 at his thatched-roofed cottage in a small town in the English countryside near Oxford, he said he had been a strong supporter of George H.W. Bush in 1980 and had founded an informal support group called “Spooks for Bush.” Sitting among photos of his children who included the drummer for the rock group, The Police, and the manager for the rock star, Sting, Copeland said he and his CIA colleagues considered Carter a dangerous idealist.

“Let me say first that we liked President Carter,” Copeland told me. “He read, unlike President Reagan later, he read everything. He knew what he was about. He understood the situation throughout the Middle East, even these tenuous, difficult problems such as Arabs and Israel.

“But the way we saw Washington at that time was that the struggle was really not between the Left and the Right, the liberals and the conservatives, as between the Utopians and the realists, the pragmatists. Carter was a Utopian. He believed, honestly, that you must do the right thing and take your chance on the consequences. He told me that. He literally believed that.”

Copeland’s deep Southern accent spit out the words with a mixture of amazement and disgust. To Copeland and his CIA friends, Carter had committed a terrible sin, sacrificing an ally on the altar of idealism. “Carter really believed in all the principles that we talk about in the West,” Copeland said, shaking his mane of white hair. “As smart as Carter is, he did believe in Mom, apple pie and the corner drug store. And those things that are good in America are good everywhere else. ...

“There were many of us – myself along with Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller, Archie Roosevelt in the CIA at the time – we believed very strongly that we were showing a kind of weakness, which people in Iran and elsewhere in the world hold in great contempt. ... The fact that we’re

being pushed around, and being afraid of the Ayatollah Khomeini, so we were going to let a friend down, which was horrifying to us. That's the sort of thing that was frightening to our friends in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt and other places."

"Carter, I say, was not a stupid man," Copeland said. Carter had even a greater flaw in Copeland's view: "He was a principled man."

In the weeks that followed the embassy seizure, Copeland said he and his friends turned their attention to figuring a way out of the mess. "That we could have gotten them out is something that all of us old professionals of the covert action school, we said from the beginning, 'Why don't they let us do it?'"

In that pursuit, Copeland wrote in *The Game Player* that he met his old friend, ex-CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton, for lunch. The famed spy hunter "brought to lunch a Mossad chap who confided that his service had identified at least half of the 'students,' even to the extent of having their home addresses in Teheran," Copeland wrote. "He gave me a rundown on what sort of kids they were. Most of them, he said, were just that, kids."

The Israeli government was another deeply interested player in the Iran crisis. For decades, Israel had cultivated covert ties with the Shah's regime as part of a Periphery Strategy of forming alliances with non-Arab states in the region to prevent Israel's Arab enemies from focusing all their might on Israel. Though losing an ally when the Shah fell and offended by the anti-Israeli rhetoric from the Khomeini regime, Israel began to quietly rebuild relations with the Iranian government.

One of the young Israeli intelligence agents assigned to this task was Ari Ben-Menashe, an Iranian-born Jew who had come to Israel as a teenager. In his own 1992 memoir, *Profits of War*, Ben-Menashe said the view of Israel's Likud leaders, including Prime Minister Menachem Begin, was one of contempt for Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s.

"Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David," Ben-Menashe wrote. "As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel's back."

After the Shah fell, Begin grew even more dissatisfied with Carter's handling of the crisis and alarmed over the growing likelihood of an Iraqi attack on Iran's oil-rich Khuzistan province. At the time, Israel saw Iraq's

Saddam Hussein as a greater threat to Israel than Iran's Khomeini. Ben-Menashe wrote that Begin, recognizing the *Realpolitik* needs of Israel, authorized shipments to Iran of small arms and some spare parts, via South Africa, as early as September 1979.

Begin's relationship with Carter had been rocky for some time, especially regarding the future of the Occupied Territories of Palestine, known as the West Bank or what Likud called Judea and Samaria, part of historical Israel. Begin and the Likud were determined "to change the facts on the ground" by moving Jewish settlers onto those lands even if that frustrated Carter's hopes of carving out a Palestinian state there.

Carter grew infuriated with Begin's refusal to negotiate. In his *White House Diary*, Carter described how heated one confrontation became after Begin insisted on deferring any agreement pending a Knesset debate. "I couldn't believe it," Carter wrote. "We spent about forty-five minutes on our feet in his study. I asked him if he actually wanted a peace treaty, because my impression was that he did with apparent relish everything he could do to obstruct it.

"He came right up and looked in my eyes about a foot away and said that he wanted peace as much as anything else in the world. It was almost midnight when I left. We had an extremely unsatisfactory meeting ... I have rarely been so disgusted in all my life. I was convinced he would do everything possible to stop a treaty, rather than face the full autonomy he had promised in the West Bank."

The hard feelings were mutual. Prime Minister Begin decided that Carter getting a second term was a grave threat to Israel's security. In the 1991 book, *The Last Option*, former Mossad and Foreign Ministry official David Kimche described Begin's attitude in noting that Israeli officials had gotten wind of "collusion" between Carter and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat "to force Israel to abandon her refusal to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Kimche continued, "This plan – prepared behind Israel's back and without her knowledge – must rank as a unique attempt in United States's diplomatic history of short-changing a friend and ally by deceit and manipulation." However, Begin recognized that the scheme required Carter winning a second term in 1980 when, Kimche wrote, "he would be free to compel Israel to accept a settlement of the Palestinian problem on his and

Egyptian terms, without having to fear the backlash of the American Jewish lobby.”

Even though Copeland was generally regarded as a CIA “Arabist” who had opposed Israeli interests in the past, he was admired for his analytical skills, Ben-Menashe explained in *Profits of War*. “A meeting between Miles Copeland and Israeli intelligence officers was held at a Georgetown house in Washington, D.C.,” Ben-Menashe wrote. “The Israelis were happy to deal with any initiative but Carter’s.

“David Kimche, chief of Tevel, the foreign relations unit of Mossad, was the senior Israeli at the meeting. ... The Israelis and the Copeland group came up with a two-pronged plan to use quiet diplomacy with the Iranians and to draw up a scheme for military action against Iran that would not jeopardize the lives of the hostages.”

In late February 1980, Seyeed Mehdi Kashani, an Iranian emissary, arrived in Israel to discuss Iran’s growing desperation for aircraft spare parts, Ben-Menashe wrote. Kashani, whom Ben-Menashe had known from their school days in Tehran, also revealed that approaches from some Republican emissaries had already been received in Iran, Ben-Menashe wrote.

“Kashani said that the secret ex-CIA-Miles-Copeland group was aware that any deal cut with the Iranians would have to include the Israelis because they would have to be used as a third party to sell military equipment to Iran,” according to Ben-Menashe. The following month, the Israelis made their first direct military shipment to Iran, 300 tires for Iran’s F-4 fighter jets, Ben-Menashe wrote.

In the 1990 interview, Copeland told me that he and other CIA old-timers hammered out their own hostage-rescue plan on March 22, 1980, in a meeting at his Georgetown apartment. Copeland said he was aided by Steven Meade, the ex-chief of the CIA’s Escape and Evasion Unit; Kermit Roosevelt, who had overseen the 1953 coup in Iran; and Archibald Roosevelt, the adviser to David Rockefeller.

“Essentially, the idea was to have some Iranians dressed in Iranian military uniform and police uniform go to the embassy, address the students and say, ‘Hey, you’re doing a marvelous job here. But now we’ll relieve

you of it, because we understand that there's going to be a military force flown in from outside. And they're going to hit you, and we're going to scatter these [hostages] around town. Thanks very much."

Copeland's Iranians would then move the hostages to the edge of Tehran where they would be loaded onto American helicopters to be flown out of the country. To Copeland's chagrin, however, his plan fell on deaf ears inside the Carter administration, which was developing its own rescue plan that would rely more on U.S. military force with only modest help from Iranian assets in Tehran. So, Copeland said he distributed his plan outside the administration, to leading Republicans, including Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon.

"Yes, I sent copies to everybody who I thought would be a good ally," Copeland told me. "Now I'm not at liberty to say what reaction, if any, ex-President Nixon took, but he certainly had a copy of this. We sent one to Henry Kissinger, and I had, at the time, a secretary who had just worked for Henry Kissinger, and Peter Rodman, who was still working for him and was a close personal friend of mine, and so we had these informal relationships where the little closed circle of people who were, a, looking forward to a Republican President within a short while and, b, who were absolutely trustworthy and who understood all these inner workings of the international game board."

By April 1980, after discovering that the Israelis had made a secret shipment of 300 tires to Iran, Carter complained to Prime Minister Begin. "There had been a rather tense discussion between President Carter and Prime Minister Begin in the spring of 1980 in which the President made clear that the Israelis had to stop that, and that we knew that they were doing it, and that we would not allow it to continue, at least not allow it to continue privately and without the knowledge of the American people," Carter's former press secretary Jody Powell told me. "And it stopped" – at least it stopped temporarily.

Questioned by congressional investigators a dozen years later, Carter said he felt that by April 1980, "Israel cast their lot with Reagan," according to notes I found among the unpublished documents in the files of the House October Surprise task force. Carter traced the Israeli opposition to his reelection to a "lingering concern [among] Jewish leaders that I was too friendly with Arabs."[\[111\]](#)

Encircled by this growing legion of enemies, the Carter administration put the finishing touches on its own hostage-rescue operation in April. Code named “Eagle Claw,” the assault involved a force of U.S. helicopters that would swoop down on Tehran, coordinate with some agents on the ground and extract the hostages. Carter ordered the operation to proceed on April 24, but mechanical problems forced the helicopters to turn back.

At a staging area called Desert One, one of the helicopters collided with a refueling plane, causing an explosion that killed eight American crewmen. Their charred bodies were then displayed by the Iranian government, adding to the fury and humiliation of the United States. After the Desert One fiasco, the Iranians dispersed the hostages to different locations, making another mass rescue attempt impossible.

By summer 1980, Copeland told me, the Republicans in his circle considered a second hostage-rescue attempt not only unfeasible, but unnecessary. They were talking confidently about the hostages being freed after a Republican victory in November, the old CIA man said.

“There was no discussion of a Kissinger or Nixon plan to rescue these people, because Nixon, like everybody else, knew that all we had to do was wait until the election came, and they were going to get out,” Copeland said. “That was sort of an open secret among people in the intelligence community, that that would happen. ... The intelligence community certainly had some understanding with somebody in Iran in authority, in a way that they would hardly confide in me.”

Copeland said his CIA friends had been told by contacts in Iran that the mullahs would do nothing to help Carter or his reelection. “At that time, we had word back, because you always have informed relations with the devil,” Copeland said. “But we had word that, ‘Don’t worry.’ As long as Carter wouldn’t get credit for getting these people out, as soon as Reagan came in, the Iranians would be happy enough to wash their hands of this and move into a new era of Iranian-American relations, whatever that turned out to be.”

In the interview, Copeland declined to give more details, beyond his assurance that “the CIA within the CIA,” the true protectors of U.S. national security, had an understanding with the Iranians about the hostages. (My interview with Copeland was cut short as his British wife complained that they were going to be late for another appointment. I asked if we could

return to continue our conversation. However, before I could interview him a second time, Copeland died on January 14, 1991.)

Yet, beyond Copeland's claims, was there any evidence that Kissinger, Archibald Roosevelt and other elements of David Rockefeller's contingent had any direct connections with people in the Reagan-Bush campaign associated with the October Surprise allegations? As it turned out, there was evidence in the Reagan-Bush campaign files pointing to undisclosed contacts between the Rockefeller-Kissinger group and Reagan's campaign chief William Casey.

According to a campaign visitor log for September 11, 1980, David Rockefeller and several of his aides who were dealing with the Iranian issue signed in to see Casey at his campaign headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. With Rockefeller were Joseph Verner Reed, whom Rockefeller had assigned to coordinate U.S. policy toward the Shah, and Archibald Roosevelt, the former CIA officer who was monitoring events in the Persian Gulf for Chase Manhattan and who had been collaborating with Miles Copeland. The fourth member of the party was Owen Frisbie, Rockefeller's chief lobbyist in Washington.[\[112\]](#)

In the early 1990s, all the surviving participants – Rockefeller, Reed and Frisbie – declined to be interviewed about the Casey meeting. Rockefeller made no mention of the meeting in *Memoirs*.

Henry Kissinger also was in discreet contact with Casey during this period, according to Casey's personal chauffeur whom I interviewed. The chauffeur, who asked not to be identified by name, said he was sent twice to Kissinger's Georgetown home to pick up the former Secretary of State and bring him to Arlington, Virginia, for private meetings with Casey, meetings that were conducted outside the campaign headquarters so they would not be recorded on the official visitor logs.

On September 16, 1980, five days after the Rockefeller visit to Casey's office, Iran's acting foreign minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh publicly cited Republican interference on the hostages. "Reagan, supported by Kissinger and others, has no intention of resolving the problem," Ghotbzadeh said. "They will do everything in their power to block it."[\[113\]](#)

In the weeks before Election 1980, FBI wiretaps picked up other evidence that connected Rockefeller associates with two of the key suspects in the October Surprise mystery, Iranian banker Cyrus Hashemi and longtime Casey business associate John Shaheen. According to the FBI wiretaps placed in Hashemi's New York offices in September 1980, Hashemi and Shaheen were involved in the Iran hostage intrigue while also pushing dubious financial schemes.

Cyrus Hashemi, along with his older brother Jamshid, was supposedly acting as an intermediary for President Carter in secret approaches to Iranian officials about getting the hostages released. But Cyrus Hashemi, according to Jamshid, veered off onto another course, serving as a conduit for the Reagan-Bush campaign to contact Iranians.

The motive appears to have been money that the FBI wiretaps revealed Hashemi and Shaheen were seeking for a bank with Philippine investors in either the Caribbean or in Hong Kong. In mid-October 1980, Hashemi deposited "a large sum of money" in a Philippine bank and planned to meet with Philippine representatives in Europe, one FBI intercept discovered.

The negotiations led Shaheen to an agreement with Herminio Disini, an in-law of Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos, to establish the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty Company. Disini also was a top moneyman for Philippine President, another international figure who held a strong grudge against President Carter for criticizing Marcos's human rights record.

Yet, the \$20 million used as starting capital for the bank traced back to David Rockefeller and Princess Ashraf through Jean A. Patry, David Rockefeller's lawyer in Geneva, Switzerland. I first learned that Ashraf was the source of the \$20 million from two Shaheen associates whom I interviewed while working on the PBS "Frontline" documentary.

However, the actual payment of the \$20 million occurred just after Ronald Reagan's Inauguration and Iran's near-simultaneous release of the American hostages on January 20, 1981. On January 22, Shaheen opened the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty Bank with \$20 million that had been funneled to him through Patry, the Rockefeller-connected lawyer in Geneva who was fronting for Princess Ashraf.

When I asked one of Shaheen's associates why Ashraf would have invested \$20 million in a bank with such dubious characters, I was told: "It was funny money," by which he meant that it was money that the Islamic revolutionary government was claiming as its own. The second Shaheen

associate said Shaheen was particularly secretive when asked about his relationship with the deposed princess. “When it comes to Ashraf, I’m a cemetery,” Shaheen once said.

From 1981 to 1984, Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty pulled in hundreds of millions of petrodollars from wealthy Arabs from the Persian Gulf, from sheikdoms that also wanted Carter out because they considered him insufficiently supportive of their authoritarian regimes. Two directors were Ghanim Al-Mazrouie, an Abu Dhabi official who controlled 10 percent of the corrupt Bank of Credit and Commerce International based in Pakistan, and Hassan Yassin, a cousin of Saudi financier Adnan Khashoggi and an adviser to BCCI principal Kamal Adham, the former chief of Saudi intelligence. The chairman of the board was Rockefeller’s lawyer, Jean Patry, with Shaheen’s son Bradford as the bank’s president.[\[114\]](#)

Though Cyrus Hashemi’s name was not formally listed on the roster of the Hong Kong bank, he also was in line to receive cash from BCCI, a delivery in early February 1981. “Money from BCCI [is] to come in tomorrow from London on Concorde,” the FBI reported based on one of the listening devices in Hashemi’s office.[\[115\]](#) The money being delivered by the supersonic plane then flying across the Atlantic was originating from BCCI in Geneva, the FBI learned.

As for Shaheen, one of his lawyers told me that Shaheen flew to Manila in early 1981 to meet face-to-face with Marcos, the man whom Shaheen considered really “in charge” of the bank. The lawyer said the Hong Kong bank was a way for Marcos “to get his hands on some of the Arabs’ Euro-petrodollars.” However, in 1984, the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty collapsed as an estimated \$100 million disappeared.

The bank’s crash put Shaheen in financial hot water, but he had other worries at the time. He was suffering from liver cancer. He succumbed to the disease on November 1, 1985. The bank’s loss was buried with him, in his estate. [\[****\]](#)

When investigators for the House October Surprise task force questioned Princess Ashraf about her reasons for making the investment, she responded by saying she considered her \$20 million investment just a routine business investment, according to the “secret” draft report that I found in the unpublished task force files. However, the public report, when issued on January 13, 1993, made no mention of Ashraf’s curious

investment in the Hong Kong Deposit and Guaranty. Nor was there any reference to the BCCI cash being flown by Concorde to Cyrus Hashemi.

The House task force's final report also left out the evasive behavior of David Rockefeller's aide, Joseph Verner Reed, who had headed up the efforts to get the Shah into the United States and then stayed active in dealing with the Reagan-Bush campaign.

Harry Penich, an FBI agent assigned to help the House task force, did try to interview Reed about his October Surprise knowledge, but found Reed hard to pin down. According to Penich's handwritten notes, "numerous telephone calls were placed to him [Reed]. He failed to answer any of them. I conservatively place the number over 10."

Finally, on December 9, 1992, Penich, armed with a subpoena, cornered Reed arriving home at his 50-acre estate in Greenwich, Connecticut. "He was surprised and absolutely livid at being served at home," Penich wrote. "His responses could best be characterized as lashing out."

Reed threatened to go over Penich's head. In "talking points" that Penich apparently used to brief an unnamed superior, the FBI agent wrote: "He [Reed] did it in such a way as to lead a reasonable person to believe he had influence w/you. The man's remarks were both inappropriate and improper."

But Reed's highhanded tactics apparently worked. When Reed finally consented to a phone interview on December 18, 1992, task force lawyers did little more than go through the motions, as Penich scribbled down the interview notes on Reed's answers.

According to those notes, Reed said he had an "acquaintanceship with Mr. Casey for years," but claimed he "does not specifically know what October Surprise refers to." Reed also insisted that he "recalls no contact with Casey in 1980" though Reed added that "their paths crossed many times because of Reed's position at Chase."

Regarding his appointment by President Reagan in 1981 to be U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, Reed said he "had no conversation w/ Casey re nomination," according to the notes. After his appointment, Reed did recall a visit to the CIA during which he "would have stopped in to see Casey and

pay respect.” As for questions about Rockefeller and Kissinger, Reed responded, “you would have to ask them.”[\[116\]](#)

Reed’s answers were hard to believe and called for aggressive follow-ups, such as: Why were Casey and Reed meeting so often regarding Chase’s business? Did Casey have a financial relationship with the bank? What about a CIA memo that claimed Casey had recruited Cyrus Hashemi into a sensitive business arrangement in 1979 involving the sale of Pahlavi Foundation property? Given Chase’s handling of the Shah’s fortune, were Casey and Hashemi working for David Rockefeller’s bank in that sale? What about Ashraf’s \$20 million used to launch Sheehan’s ill-fated Hong Kong bank? Was it also from those Pahlavi funds?

However, Reed’s sketchy answers were good enough for the House task force team that was putting the finishing touches on a finding of Republican innocence. The task force lawyers didn’t even challenge Reed’s claim of “no contact with Casey in 1980,” though the lawyers had in their possession the sign-in sheets of the Reagan-Bush campaign headquarters which revealed Reed signing in with David Rockefeller, Archibald Roosevelt and Owen Frisbie to visit Casey on September 11, 1980. According to Penich’s notes, the lawyers asked no questions about the substance of that mysterious meeting.

On December 21, 1992, three days after Reed’s deposition, the task force received more details about Reed’s meeting with Casey at CIA headquarters in 1981. When the lawyers deposed former CIA officer Charles Cogan, he said he was in Casey’s seventh-floor office in Langley, Virginia, getting up to leave when Reed arrived. Knowing Reed, Cogan said he lingered at the door.

Cogan said he had a “definite memory” of a comment Reed made about disrupting Carter’s “October Surprise” of a pre-election release of the 52 American hostages in Iran. “Joseph Reed said, ‘we’ and then the verb [and then] something about Carter’s October Surprise,” Cogan testified. “The implication was we did something about Carter’s October Surprise, but I don’t have the exact wording.”[\[117\]](#)

An investigator later told me that Cogan confided in a less formal setting that the verb Reed used was “fucked” as in “we fucked Carter’s October Surprise.”

After Cogan offered this revelation, David Laufman, a Republican lawyer on the task force and a former CIA official, asked Cogan if he had

since “had occasion to ask him [Reed] about this” recollection? Yes, Cogan replied, he recently had asked Reed about it, after Reed moved to a protocol job at the United Nations.

“I called him up,” Cogan said. “He was at his farm in Connecticut, as I recall, and I just told him that, look, this is what sticks in my mind and what I am going to say [to Congress], and he didn't have any comment on it and continued on to other matters.”

“He didn't offer any explanation to you of what he meant?” asked Laufman.

“No,” answered Cogan.

“Nor did he deny that he had said it?” asked another task force lawyer, Mark L. Shaffer.

“He didn't say anything,” Cogan responded. “We just continued on talking about other things.”

And so did the task force lawyers at this remarkable deposition. The lawyers even failed to ask Cogan the obvious follow-up: How did Casey react when Reed allegedly told Reagan's ex-campaign chief that “we fucked Carter's October Surprise.”

Casey died in 1987, from brain cancer, as the Iran-Contra scandal was beginning to unfold but before the October Surprise allegations had come under scrutiny.

Henry Kissinger wasn't the only veteran of the 1968 Vietnam gambit who reappeared in the 1980 Iran mystery. Richard Nixon also lurked in the shadows. Not only did CIA Old Boy Miles Copeland describe his consultation with the disgraced ex-President over the Iranian hostage crisis in spring 1980 but the British press reported that Nixon was still cursing Carter's perceived weakness and pondering the feasibility of a second rescue attempt three months after the Desert One fiasco.

According to a 1989 article in the London *Sunday Telegraph*, Nixon consulted in late July 1980 with Alan Bristow, a helicopter specialist with close ties to the British Special Air Services, SAS, a clandestine military arm of British intelligence. When I contacted the reporter on the story in 1990, Simon O'Dwyer-Russell said Bristow had described an angry Nixon pacing the floor and denouncing Carter.

However, according to Copeland's account, Nixon soon recognized that the Iranian hostage crisis would set the stage for a Republican victory in November 1980, after which the American hostages would be freed. "Nixon ... knew that all we had to do was wait until the election came, and they were going to get out," Copeland said, indicating that Nixon, the master of the political dark arts, stayed active in the shadowy world where politics and intelligence operations intersected even after his disgrace in Watergate.

I must admit when I first heard Copeland make reference to Nixon's October Surprise role, I found his description implausible. Like many Americans, I had assumed that once Nixon resigned the presidency in 1974, he withdrew into a bleak and foreboding retirement, occasionally reemerging to defend his tattered legacy.

But that narrative was another false one, exposed as such by the chronicler of Nixon's last years, Monica Crowley. In her 1996 book, *Nixon Off the Record*, Crowley recounted Nixon's continued engagement as an adviser to senior Republicans regarding the dirty tricks that can help win elections.

For instance, in summer 1992, as Democrat Bill Clinton was challenging Nixon's old ally, George H.W. Bush, for the presidency, Crowley recorded Nixon ruminating about how the Republicans could exploit rumors that Clinton had tried to renounce his U.S. citizenship in the 1960s while a Rhodes scholar at Oxford. The rumor attracted the interest of Nixon who was pondering how that story or some personal scandal would be needed to save Bush.

"The only way we can win now is if Clinton collapses, and I think he is too smart to do that," Nixon told Crowley on August 28, 1992. "The only things that would be self-destructive would be bombshells, like a letter showing that he asked to renounce his American citizenship during Vietnam, an illegitimate child, things like that."[\[118\]](#)

While it's not known whether Nixon offered these suggestions to then-President George H.W. Bush, it is known that in the following month, Bush pushed his White House aides to pursue the rumor that Clinton had written a letter seeking to renounce his citizenship. That led to State Department officials conducting a late-night search of Clinton's passport file, which found no such letter.

But a Bush administration official still cited some staple holes in the corner of Clinton's passport application to fashion a "criminal referral" to suggest that someone might have tampered with the file to remove the imagined letter. The referral was then leaked to the press, injecting into the presidential campaign the suspicion that Clinton may have tried to renounce his citizenship and covered it up. [++++]

Even after Clinton's victory, Nixon would remain interested in how the young Democratic president could be brought down and humiliated in a way similar to what Nixon had experienced with Watergate. As Crowley reported, Nixon plotted to destroy Clinton even as Clinton was extending a hand of friendship to Nixon.

Clinton began seeking Nixon's advice on everything from foreign policy to time scheduling. The first contact – a 40-minute conversation – was made on March 2, 1993, barely a month after Clinton entered the White House "and their unexpectedly close relationship was born," wrote Crowley.

After the first call, Nixon sounded genuinely touched that Clinton had reached out. "He was very respectful but with no sickening bullshit," Nixon told Crowley. "It was the best conversation with a president I've had since I was president."

Six days later, Nixon traveled to Washington for an announced public meeting with Clinton in the White House, an honor that Nixon had not received from Clinton's Republican predecessors who had snuck Nixon in the back door for unannounced private meetings. Again, Nixon seemed sincerely moved by Clinton's gesture.

"Clinton is very earthy," Nixon told Crowley. "He cursed – 'asshole,' 'son of a bitch,' 'bastard' — you know. He's a very straightforward conversationalist." Nixon also acknowledged, in an edgy tone, that the formal White House meeting with Clinton "was more than either Reagan or Bush ever gave me."

But typical of Nixon, he was soon scheming to undo the Democratic president who had reached out to him. Nixon exploited his personal knowledge of Clinton to offer back-channel political advice to Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, whom Nixon correctly considered to be the likely Republican nominee in 1996.

Nixon also privately hoped that the Clintons' troubled Whitewater investment would turn into a second Watergate that would ruin Clinton and

his wife – and somehow settle an old score Nixon felt toward Democrats and anti-war demonstrators of the 1960s.

In one comment on April 13, 1994, four days before the stroke that led to his death, Nixon called Crowley and chortled about the surging Whitewater scandal. “Clinton should pay the price,” Nixon declared. “Our people shouldn’t let this issue go down. They mustn’t let it sink.” Nixon said he had called Dole to make sure that aggressive questioners were put on the Whitewater investigating committee.

Later that month, at Nixon’s funeral, Clinton paid tribute to the Republican president. “May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close,” Clinton wished, not knowing what such a full-scale assessment might reveal.

In the months after Nixon’s death – following his playbook posthumously – the Republican pummeled Clinton over his old Whitewater real estate investments and various personal indiscretions. Eventually, the determined GOP investigations exposed Clinton’s extramarital affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Republicans then made Clinton only the second U.S. president in history to face the humiliation of impeachment in the House and a trial in the Senate. Though Clinton survived the Senate ordeal – as did the other impeached President, Andrew Johnson, after the Civil War – Clinton was driven deep into debt over lawyer fees and his legacy was tarnished.

After reading Crowley’s book, I came to believe that Copeland’s account of Nixon’s behind-the-scenes role in the October Surprise drama was not as unlikely as it first seemed to me. Nixon had a powerful motive to see President Carter brought down, since it was Carter – with his “I won’t lie to you” pledge during Campaign 1976 – who had exploited America’s disgust at Nixon’s serial lying.

Carter also made human rights an important element of U.S. foreign policy, another slap at Nixon’s *Realpolitik* approach to the world, which was much closer to the distilled cynicism of Miles Copeland’s “CIA within the CIA” than to Carter’s do-right principles.

In other ways, Nixon could be considered the principal architect for Reagan’s victory in 1980, which benefited from Nixon’s Southern Strategy, i.e., the exploitation of white resentment over Democratic support for civil rights. Appealing to Southern whites, Reagan used coded racial messages about “welfare queens” and launched his general-election campaign in

Philadelphia, Mississippi, the site of the infamous 1964 lynching deaths of three civil rights workers – James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner.

In 1980, Reagan also benefited from the deep wedge that Nixon had driven between the hawk-and-dove factions of the Democratic Party by frustrating President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam peace plan in 1968 and then continuing the war for another four years. The extended war splintered the Democrats' New Deal coalition, turning "hard-hats" against "hippies" and splitting Cold War Democrats from those favoring more peaceful approaches to world affairs.

Thus, Nixon bequeathed to the Republican Party the makings of a national political majority, with white working-class men and pro-war intellectuals known as the neocons joining the traditional Republican base of anti-government businessmen and cultural conservatives. That Nixon would wield another cleaver against Carter and the Democrats during the Iranian hostage crisis in 1980 made more sense after reading Crowley's book. A corrected American narrative had to account for Nixon's curious presence in the background of the October Surprise case.

Chapter Eight: The Cover-up Succeeds

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush saw the high poll numbers that had surrounded him after the Persian Gulf victory over Iraq in 1991 begin to fade. Much of that lost luster resulted from a severe economic recession and a soaring budget deficit, but some of the shine was rubbed off by the lingering suspicions about Bush's role in the interlocking national security scandals of the 1980s: the Iran-Contra Affair, the Iraqgate support for Saddam Hussein and the October Surprise case.

As Campaign 1992 entered its stretch run, the Republican "delay/filibuster strategy" largely had succeeded in averting serious harm from the October Surprise case, but the Iran-Contra scandal flared up the Friday before the election when independent counsel Lawrence Walsh secured a new indictment of Ronald Reagan's Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. The indictment included documentary evidence showing that Bush had lied when he claimed to be "not in the loop" on the controversial decision to ship missiles to Iran.

Bush lashed out bitterly at Walsh and blamed the indictment for stopping what looked like a last-minute rise in his poll numbers. The next Tuesday, on November 3, 1992, with populist billionaire Ross Perot siphoning off some Republican votes, George H.W. Bush lost to Democrat Bill Clinton.

A month after the election, Lawrence Barcella and his team moved to wrap up the October Surprise investigation with a verdict of Republican innocence. But Barcella seemed to sense how fragile his ruling for the Reagan-Bush team was. On December 8, 1992, he instructed his deputies "to put some language in, as a trap door" in case later disclosures disproved parts of the report or if complaints arose about selective omission of evidence.

"This report does not and could not reflect every single lead that was investigated, every single phone call that was made, every single contact that was established," Barcella suggested as "trap door" wording. "Similarly, the Task Force did not resolve every single one of the scores of 'curiosities,' 'coincidences,' sub-allegations or question marks that have

been raised over the years and become part of the October Surprise story.”[\[119\]](#)

According to a cover letter accompanying the final report, the task force voted unanimously on December 10, 1992, to exonerate Reagan, Bush and the rest of their campaign operatives. However, in 2010, I was told by one of the task force members, Rep. Mervyn Dymally, D-California, that he knew of no such vote on that date or at any other time. When I contacted former task force chairman Lee Hamilton about Dymally’s comment, Hamilton insisted that he would not have claimed there was a unanimous vote if there hadn’t been one.

However, when I checked with the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I was told that no record could be found of a roll call of a task force vote. “From the records we have there is no evidence of a recorded vote,” said committee spokesman David Barnes in an e-mail. In 1994, when I had searched through the task force’s unpublished files, I also found no record of a roll call vote.

Curiously, too, much of the late-arriving surge of incriminating evidence – that Barcella said caused him to unsuccessfully request a three-month extension from Hamilton – did not reach the task force until a week or more after the alleged vote by the task force members to approve the report’s findings.

For instance, on December 17, former Iranian President Bani-Sadr sent a letter describing the internal struggles between his political faction and the Khomeini faction over the propriety of negotiating a delay in the hostage release with the Republicans. Bani-Sadr said he objected to the subterfuge and even threatened to go public with word of the illicit GOP offer but was outmaneuvered by Khomeini and the more radical Islamists.

Though Bani-Sadr’s letter contained a wealth of new information about the Iranian side of the October Surprise scandal, Barcella’s team simply misrepresented its content in the final report, dismissing Bani-Sadr’s first-hand accounts as “hearsay.”[\[120\]](#)

On December 18, biographer David Andelman gave his sworn testimony that French intelligence chief deMarenches admitted to him arranging meetings for Republicans with Iranians in Paris in October 1980. After Andelman’s testimony, the task force called deMarenches, but – when the imperious French spymaster failed to return the call – the task force just dropped the issue.

In its report, the task force concluded, paradoxically, that Andelman's testimony was "credible" but was "insufficiently probative." The reasoning went that Andelman could not "rule out the possibility that deMarenches had told him he was aware of and involved in the Casey meetings because he, deMarenches, could not risk telling his biographer he had no knowledge of these allegations."[\[121\]](#)

In other words, faced with compelling new evidence of a Paris meeting – a claim already corroborated from a variety of other witnesses – Barcella's team fell back on the subjective legal concept of what is "probative" and what isn't.

On December 21, 1992, the task force got another jolt when former CIA officer Charles Cogan arrived and recounted the remark from early 1981 by David Rockefeller's aide Joseph Verner Reed to then-CIA Director William Casey, regarding doing something to block Carter's "October Surprise." Cogan's testimony was simply filed away in the boxes that I found in late 1994.

Meanwhile, in December 1992, as Lee Hamilton and his task force were putting to rest the nettlesome October Surprise scandal from the 1980s, lame-duck President George H.W. Bush was getting a sympathetic hearing from several leading Democrats and some news executives that it was time to pull the plug on the Iran-Contra criminal investigation as well.

On Christmas Eve 1992, Bush pardoned a half dozen Iran-Contra defendants, including several CIA officers, prominent neoconservative (and former Assistant Secretary of State) Elliott Abrams, and ex-Defense Secretary Weinberger, whose cover-up trial was set to begin in January 1993. The mass pardon effectively killed special prosecutor Walsh's efforts to get to the bottom of the Iran-Contra scandal, including Bush's personal role in the decision-making and in concealing his personal notes.

I was told by one of Walsh's senior advisers that the investigation also had begun to focus on the possibility that the seeds of those arms-for-hostage deals were sown in 1980 with contacts between Reagan's campaign and the Iranians. Otherwise, Walsh's team was having trouble understanding why President Reagan would have agreed to continue the 1985-1986 arms-for-hostage swaps with Iran when their allies in Lebanon responded to each arms shipment to Iran by freeing one hostage and then taking another.

The growing suspicion that the two scandals – October Surprise and Iran-Contra – were really one narrative led to investigators posing October Surprise questions during a polygraph of Donald Gregg, the former CIA officer and Vice President Bush’s national security adviser in the 1980s. Gregg’s denials of involvement in the October Surprise operation were judged deceptive.

In 2010, when I met with former Rep. Dymally at a coffee shop near the Los Angeles International Airport, he explained how surprised he had been when – while working on his memoirs – he discovered Hamilton’s claim that a unanimous vote had been taken on December 10, 1992, especially since Dymally was still in the process of evaluating a draft of the task force’s report at the time.

Dymally told me further that there was never a “consultative” process between the task force members and the lead investigators about the inquiry. Mostly, he said, a couple of members might show up for a closed meeting and get “a slight briefing” from Barcella. He noted that the task force held no significant public hearings at which witnesses could present their claims about Republican-Iranian contacts.

“My sense is that they wanted to say, ‘let’s forget this whole thing,’ say it never happened and move on,” Dymally said.

Another problem, according to Dymally, was that the Republicans were determined to block any serious investigation, and – on the Democratic side – “there was no constituency that was interested in this, other than its historical aspect.”

On January 3, 1993, more than three weeks after the supposedly unanimous vote approving the House task force report, Dymally submitted a dissent which complained about selective handling of evidence to clear the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign. Dymally, who was retiring from Congress, cited the investigation’s reliance on shaky circumstantial data for exonerating the Republicans and the uncritical acceptance of accounts from Casey’s associates.

In reviewing the draft report, Dymally’s staff aide, Marwan Burgan, had spotted some of its absurd alibis, including the one related to the alleged Madrid meeting in late July 1980. Barcella’s team was claiming that

because Reagan's foreign policy aide Richard Allen had written down Casey's home phone number on August 2, 1980, that proved Casey was at home on that date and thus could not have attended the Bohemian Grove encampment that weekend.

The draft report also speculated that because there was a direct flight from San Francisco to London on July 27 that Casey must have been on it – and thus must have been at the Grove that weekend – although there was no documentary evidence to support that conclusion. There were no records of Casey being aboard the flight to London, and there was a wealth of documentary evidence that Casey was at the Grove on the first weekend of August, not the last weekend of July. Barcella and his team had simply cobbled together the Casey alibi out of nothing.

Dymally's dissent argued, quite reasonably, that “just because phones ring and planes fly doesn't mean that someone is there to answer the phone or is on the plane.” But Dymally's obvious observations were fiercely opposed by Barcella, who enlisted task force chairman, Lee Hamilton, to pressure Dymally into withdrawing the dissent. Dymally told me that the day his dissent was submitted, he received a call from Hamilton warning him that if the dissent was not withdrawn, “I will have to come down hard on you.”

The next day, Hamilton, who was becoming chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, fired the staff of the Africa subcommittee that Dymally had headed. The firings were billed as routine, and Hamilton told me that “the two things came along at the same time, but they were not connected in my mind.” Hamilton said his warning to Dymally referred to a toughly worded response that Hamilton would have fired off at Dymally if the dissent had stood.

However, hoping to salvage the jobs of some of his staff, Dymally agreed to withdraw the dissent, although he still refused to sign the report. That fact – Dymally's continued opposition which contradicted the cover letter's claim of unanimity – was relegated to a single sentence on page 244 of the report under the subhead, “Office Space and Equipment.”

Dymally also told me in 2010 that the late-arriving evidence further implicating the Republicans wasn't made available to him and the possibility of extending the investigation wasn't discussed in his presence.

The attitude among most of the Democrats, as well as the Republicans, was that there was no further need to excavate the dirt from the Reagan-

Bush years, since Reagan was already a beloved statesman suffering from Alzheimer's disease and Bush was a well-liked figure who had just suffered the humiliation of defeat for reelection.

"Once the election passed, whatever interest in the investigation waned," said a senior Democratic aide who spoke on condition of anonymity. "People were looking toward a new Democratic administration, staffing, et cetera; they were not that interested in an old scandal."

So the House task force's report was shipped off to the printers with its conclusion that there was "no credible evidence" of Republican double-dealing with Iran over the 52 U.S. hostages in 1980. The report was scheduled for release on January 13, 1993, just one week before Bush's presidency would come to an official end. But there was still one more surprise for the October Surprise task force.

On January 11, 1993, a response arrived to a query that Chairman Hamilton had sent to the Russian government on October 21, 1992, requesting any information that Moscow might have about the 1980 October Surprise case. The Russian Report reached a diametrically opposed conclusion, citing Soviet intelligence information confirming that Casey, Bush and other Republican operatives had met with Iranian officials in Europe during the 1980 campaign and "discussed the question of possibly delaying the release of 52 hostages from the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran."

As to what happened next with the Russian Report, Barcella and Hamilton somewhat disagree, with Hamilton claiming he never saw it and Barcella saying he discussed it with Hamilton although conceding that he may not have actually shown it to Hamilton. Whatever the case, the report was deposited into a non-descript brown cardboard box, taken to some auxiliary office space in the House Rayburn Parking Garage and dumped into an abandoned Ladies Room where I found it in late 1994.

In 2010 – in his last months of life as he battled bladder cancer – Barcella took issue with my choice of verb when I wrote that he had "hid" the Russian Report. He accused me of "flat out lying" and insisted that he could have made finding the Russian Report even harder if not impossible.

“Trust me Bob, if I didn't want that rpt to surface, you wouldn't have found it,” Barcella wrote in an e-mail.

Still, it seemed pretty clear that Barcella really “didn’t want that rpt to surface.” He might reasonably have thought that sticking it in a box that would likely disappear into some government warehouse was a pretty safe way to make sure that it wouldn’t. The prospect that some future historian would locate such an obscure document and make any sense out of it is more a reassuring myth than a real likelihood. Except for my unlikely trip to the abandoned Ladies Room deep inside the Rayburn House Parking Garage, it probably would have remained safely outside the public domain, possibly forever.

As he had done consistently since the October Surprise report was published in 1993, Barcella refused to answer my questions about any of the specifics, like the irrational alibis. He also continued his longstanding practice of responding to my questions with personal insults. Since 1993, he had reacted to my questions about the report not with answers but with suggestions that I was crazy for asking.

Continuing that pattern in 2010, he wrote: “It’s sad that after so many years, you’re still obsessing over this. It’s equally sad that you have insisted on one-sided interpretations and twisted characterizations of things. Nonetheless, at the risk of feeding your quixotic obsession, here’s my best recollection, recognizing it is at best partial after nearly 2 decades.

“The information from Russia came in literally at the last minute. It’s [sic] source was unclear and needed verification. The information was hardly self-authenticating and lacked detail. Russia was in chaos in this immediate post-Soviet Union period and information and disinformation was spewing out like and uncapped oil well.

“The Task Force report was either printed or at the printers. The Task Force authorization was expiring or expired. It was only authorized for that Congress and that congress had expired. I spoke briefly w/ Lee [Hamilton] and don't recall whether I showed him the Russian report or not. He felt ham-strung, as there was a new Congress, a new (and Democratic) President, a new Administration and new priorities and nothing could be done w/o a whole new re-authorization process. The original authorization had been very acrimonious and had taken weeks and weeks.

“He wasn't sure there was any stomach for fighting for re-authorization, particularly given the thoroughness of the investigation and

confidence in the results. There's no doubt in my mind that if It were up to Lee, he would have given me the green light. The realist in him knew that the House leadership wasn't going to break their pick on a re-authorization fight." [####]

In a responding e-mail, I wrote: "As for the investigation, as reflected in the [House task force] report, it is anything but meticulous. Indeed, many of the alibis are laughable. Surely, you don't think that Dick Allen's writing down Bill Casey's home phone number on one day is proof that Casey was at home, especially since Allen told the task force he had no memory (or record) of calling Casey that day. Surely, you were aware that Larry Casey was lying when he concocted another alibi for his uncle, after presenting Frontline with an entirely different (and provably false) alibi."

Then, in a reference to the task force's peculiar deal with President George H.W. Bush in which the identity of a key alibi witness was shared with the investigators only with the proviso that they never question or publicly identify the witness, I wrote: "Surely, as a seasoned prosecutor, you would not accept an agreement from someone who identifies an alibi witness but then forbids you to speak with the alibi witness. Even a rookie cop would laugh at that one."

However, Barcella continued to rebuff the opportunity to explain how these and other judgments could be defended. "I told you I'm not going get into a point by point with you," he wrote. "I'm not going to take the time or expend the energy to go line by line over what you've spewed out the past year or so. ... Time is too precious to me right now than to deal with your obsession."

I wished him well with his health, but it was clear that Barcella – to the end – would rely on bluster to shield his sophistry. It also struck me that perhaps Barcella's touchiness over his discredited October Surprise conclusions was partly explained by how his once sterling image as a lawyer had been tarnished by the collapse of another high-profile case that he had handled.

Much of his legal reputation had rested on his role as a tough prosecutor in the early 1980s capturing "rogue" CIA operative Edwin Wilson, who was then convicted of selling explosives and other military items to Libya. Wilson received a long prison term, much of it to be served in solitary confinement at a harsh maximum security prison.

However, in 2003, a federal judge learned that the U.S. government had lied in a key affidavit which denied that Wilson was in contact with senior CIA official Ted Shackley and other CIA officers regarding his work with the Libyans. The government's false affidavit, which had devastated Wilson's defense that he was cooperating with the CIA, was read twice to the jury before it returned the guilty verdict in 1983. Jury foreman Wally Sisk said that without the affidavit, the jury would not have convicted Wilson.

"That would have taken away the whole case of the prosecution," Sisk said.

The discovery of this prosecutorial abuse – after Wilson had been imprisoned for two decades – led U.S. District Judge Lynn N. Hughes to vacate Wilson's conviction for selling military items to Libya.

"There were, in fact, over 80 contacts, including actions parallel to those in the charges," Hughes wrote in a blistering decision. "The government discussed among dozens of its officials and lawyers whether to correct the testimony. No correction was made," until Wilson's lawyers managed to pry loose an internal memo describing the false affidavit and revealing the debate among government officials about what to do.

In an interview with ABC's "Nightline," Wilson called Barcella and another prosecutor "evil" for their role in the deception. "Once they got me convicted, then they had to cover this thing up constantly," Wilson said. "They wanted to make sure that I would never get out of prison."

Barcella, who was the supervising prosecutor in the Wilson case, said he didn't recall seeing the affidavit before it was introduced and denied any impropriety afterwards when other government officials challenged the affidavit's accuracy. But the revelation that Wilson's conviction had relied on government lying turned what had been a bright spot in Barcella's résumé into a black mark. If his October Surprise debunking was revealed to be another legal fraud, Barcella would be left with little in the way of a legal legacy.

Lawrence Barcella died on November 4, 2010, at the age of 65.

The Republican success in 1992 and 1993 in shutting down the investigations into Iran-Contra and its sister scandals, October Surprise and

Iraqgate, ensured that the near-term political narrative would protect the legacies of Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and other Republican luminaries.

One of the direct consequences of this success was the emergence less than eight years later of Texas Gov. George W. Bush as a serious contender for the presidency. If his father's hand in the major political scandals of the 1980s had been fully exposed, there likely would not have been a George W. Bush candidacy in 2000, let alone a second Bush presidency.

However, Democratic timidity regarding the national security scandals of the 1980s and President George H.W. Bush's audacity in pardoning six Iran-Contra defendants on Christmas Eve 1992 had combined to establish a false narrative for the era. Many Americans, including those who regarded themselves as political sophisticates, accepted that the Iran-Contra and Iraqgate scandals were much ado about nothing and that the October Surprise case consisted of false allegations against innocent Republican public servants.

As happened in 1968, when Defense Secretary Clark Clifford counseled President Johnson to stay silent about Nixon's Vietnam peace sabotage for the "good of the country," the Democrats again convinced themselves that averting their eyes from Republican wrongdoing was the patriotic thing to do. However, the false narrative of Republicans-as-victims had profound consequences for the nation's future.

How history might have been different was explained to me when I traveled to San Francisco after the Iran-Contra investigation had ground to a halt in 1993 in the wake of Bush's pardons. I spoke with attorney James Brosnahan, who had been tapped by Iran-Contra special counsel Lawrence Walsh to be the lead prosecutor in the trial of former Defense Secretary Weinberger, which had been scheduled to start January 5, 1993.

Brosnahan felt that the disclosures at the Weinberger trial might have changed history, as Americans would finally have gotten a look inside the persistent cover-ups and endless deceptions of Reagan's presidency. However, Brosnahan noted, President George H.W. Bush sensed that key Democrats again were unwilling to fight for the truth.

"Within the Beltway, they had been chewing on Judge Walsh for several years," Brosnahan said. "When I got there, I was really surprised at the nature of the attacks and how unfair they were."

The right-wing *Washington Times*, in particular, trumpeted every anti-Walsh propaganda theme that the Republicans could think up, from petty questions about Walsh's spending on room-service meals to endless complaints about the slow pace of the investigation, which was bogged down by the delaying tactics of the Reagan and Bush-41 administrations.

Brosnahan said, "It was all so transparent that I was disappointed that more people didn't pick up on the fact that all they were really trying to do was obstruct the trial of Caspar Weinberger. I'm talking about obstruction of justice. The statute, I took it out of the book and made a Xeroxed copy out of it and stuck it up on my wall. ... [Walsh] was obstructed starting in '86 and [Bush's Christmas Eve '92] pardon was the final *coup de grace*."

According to Brosnahan, Bush's pardons were "admired by some, ignored by many, and seen as a threat to our democratic form of government by a number, of which I am one. ... And that's the only way they could get rid of [Walsh]. They couldn't have a trial. They couldn't allow witnesses to be asked where they were, what they heard. They couldn't have Weinberger's notes out in public because it said the President [Ronald Reagan] approved all of this."

In December 1992, outgoing President George H.W. Bush also knew that he might be called as a defense witness, possibly forcing him to disclose the broader scope of the Iran-Contra scandal, including how the arms-for-hostage shipments to Iran had originated.

But Brosnahan doubted that Bush would have had the nerve to go through with the mass pardons if he hadn't received indications from top Democrats that they wouldn't object. Brosnahan said the all-clear signal was sent by House Speaker Thomas Foley and Rep. Les Aspin, then President-elect Clinton's choice to fill the post of Defense Secretary.

Brosnahan told me, "Foley said okay, Aspin said okay, pardon the Secretary of Defense who lied to Congress. That's okay with Foley. That's okay with Aspin. ... For the Congress, they're not clear if they want to be lied to or not. ... [Around the country] there is a different attitude that some of those folks in Washington have no idea about and have no interest in, that attitude is that they [many Americans] would like a government, for god's sake, where the truth is important, where the Constitution matters, and where some of the better traditions in governance in this country are honored. [These Americans] are made very uncomfortable by deceitful practices. ... They are very troubled by this story."

If the Weinberger trial had taken place, Brosnahan expected that some senior members of the Reagan administration would have confessed their involvement in a long-running cover-up, including former White House chief of staff Don Regan. Brosnahan said:

“Regan would say that when it broke at first he ... denied things right early on, [saying] ‘they never happened, nothing, nothing,’ but it came to a point when it was just out of control. And he knew that. ... At some point in there he wanted to get the whole thing out. ... It would have been a helluva trial.”

Brosnahan’s reference to Regan’s first inclination to lie and deny had special resonance to me because in my first week at *Newsweek* in early 1987, I had uncovered the existence of the desperate White House cover-up to conceal the role of President Reagan in approving the illegal arms sales to Iran as well as Don Regan’s role in spearheading the effort to shield Reagan from possible impeachment.

My *Newsweek* editors initially were excited about the scoop and put the story on the cover with a stark black-and-white image of Reagan. However, after Reagan’s White House denounced the article, a number of mainstream news outlets, including *The Washington Post* in its “Style” section, mocked the story as a breathless overreach.

Faced with this ridicule, *Newsweek* executives immediately turned tail. I was told by one of the receptionists at the *Newsweek* office in Washington that bureau chief Evan Thomas was so ashamed of my article that he went around the office removing copies of that issue from the tables where past issues of *Newsweek* are strewn about, part decoration and part reading material for visitors.

The fact that the story turned out to be correct would never repair my standing with the magazine’s senior editors. As a saying about modern Washington goes: “There’s no honor in being right too soon. People just remember that you were out of step and crazy.”

By the time Don Regan was prepared to take the stand in the Weinberger trial and confess that he had indeed overseen an aggressive cover-up, I would have been out of *Newsweek* for more than two years. But Regan never got the chance to give the frank testimony that Brosnahan expected because President George H.W. Bush finished the cover-up with his mass pardons, which were widely accepted and praised in the

media/political centers of Washington, including inside the Post/Newsweek company.

“The cross-examination of Caspar Weinberger was going to be an event,” Brosnahan told me. “The thing about cross-examinations in a trial is that there’s no place to hide. The political bullshit is over. There’s only the question where were you? You’re in charge of missiles, what did you hear? What did the President say? What about this document? What about your notes? What about your testimony?”

Brosnahan asked me, “Do you understand why there was a pardon?” He then answered his own question, “There was a pardon because an awful lot of people wanted this to go away. ... Would Bush have pardoned if there had been open, aggressive leadership from certain segments of the Senate and the House? ... I don’t think that he would have.”

Brosnahan added that other important people, besides Weinberger, had much to lose if the trial had gone forward because they would have been confronted with the hard choice of either telling the truth or risking their own prosecution for perjury or obstruction of justice. One of those individuals was General Colin Powell, who had served as Weinberger’s assistant during much of the Iran-Contra scandal.

If – as Brosnahan noted – Weinberger was the senior civilian official with legal responsibility for the American missiles and other equipment that the Reagan administration shipped to Iran, Powell was the senior military officer who was responsible for shipping them. Brosnahan said the Weinberger trial would have put Powell on the spot and might have altered the high esteem in which he was held, as the first African-American chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who oversaw the U.S. military during the Persian Gulf War of 1991.

But none of that happened because the Weinberger trial was aborted as a joint agreement between vulnerable Republicans and accommodating Democrats. According to Brosnahan, the Iran-Contra cover-up succeeded because of the determination of key Republicans to conceal the truth and the absence of determination among key Democrats to fight for the truth.

I had heard a similar account from Spencer Oliver when I interviewed him in the summer of 1992, as it was becoming clear that Democratic

congressional leaders were throwing in the towel on a range of national security investigations, from October Surprise to Iran-Contra to Iraqgate.

Oliver's experience with Republican wrongdoing had stretched back to the Watergate scandal when Nixon's Watergate burglars had planted a bug on his phone at the Democratic National Committee headquarters. In Oliver's view, the crucial Republican lesson from the Watergate scandal was not the imperative to obey the law but an appreciation of more effective cover-ups. Oliver believed that during the Reagan and Bush-41 presidencies, the Republicans honed those skills to a very sharp edge.

"When corruption reaches the highest precincts of government, the protection mechanisms for the people who inhabit those precincts are so powerful that they are almost impenetrable," Oliver said. "What we saw in Watergate and what we saw in Iran-Contra and what we saw in October Surprise – we saw these defense mechanisms used to discredit honest politicians and honest journalists. The result is that the word has been conveyed that if you take on people with positions of power, you have to be prepared to pay the highest price in terms of your job, your career, and even your friends.

"You find that there are fewer and fewer people willing to pay that price, and for democracy that is a very dangerous development. The tools that are available to people of great power in the U.S. government are so frightening in their impact on an individual that it has the effect of making most people conclude that it is just not worth the candle to fight the battle.

"It is like the old saying about striking the king, that when you strike at the king, you better not miss, because if you miss, the king will destroy you. When you seek to expose duplicity and corruption of the highest levels of American power, you invite the kind of retaliation that will almost certainly destroy you and, if not destroy you, cause you serious damage from which you will surely never recover."

As Oliver offered these insights into the nature of modern American power at the highest levels, he spoke not in anger, but matter-of-factly. He was explaining why – after a dozen years of holding the White House – the Republicans in 1992 had grown so particularly ruthless in exercising power:

"What they learned from Watergate was not 'don't do it,' but 'cover it up more effectively.' They have learned that they have to frustrate congressional oversight and press scrutiny in a way that will avoid another major scandal. They have learned how to withhold documents, create cover

stories, throw scapegoats over the side, and prevent the truth from ever coming out. They've become experts in convincing officials to perjure themselves to protect their dirty little secrets and attacking the investigators either in Congress or in the press.

"It's all politics to them – the pursuit and maintenance of power. It is the ultimate example of the ends justify the means, and the means are so abhorrent to democracy that they cannot let the people know. ... If the October Surprise did happen, whoever did it committed treason and then everyone who was implicated is bound together in a conspiracy forever. Whatever corrupt act they engage in, they have to go along. They can never leave. It is like joining the Mafia in a novelistic sense. Once you've taken the pledge, you're inextricably bound.

"None of the people who would have known about October Surprise has been thrown over the side. They've all been kept in the bosom of the power structure. They have all been well cared for in the government or outside with consultancies. You have to ask this question: Why? The conclusion you have to reach is that they have to be taken care of. The attacks on those who have sought the truth have been so extreme that the conclusion must be that the allegations are true. While we pursue nothing more than the truth, to them it is a death sentence."

Over the years, I've sought to interview former President Carter about his thoughts on the October Surprise case, but he has always declined. Mostly, he has behaved as if he wished the questions would just go away, perhaps fearing that he would be accused of sour grapes or mocked as a conspiracy theorist if he demanded answers.

In 1996, Carter reportedly recoiled when Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat tried to confess his role in the Republican maneuvering to block Carter's Iran-hostage negotiations.

"There is something I want to tell you," Arafat said, addressing Carter at a meeting in Arafat's bunker in Gaza City in the presence of historian Douglas Brinkley. "You should know that in 1980 the Republicans approached me with an arms deal [for the PLO] if I could arrange to keep the hostages in Iran until after the [U.S. presidential] election."

Arafat apparently was prepared to provide additional details and evidence, but Carter raised his hands, indicating that he didn't want to hear anymore. Brinkley recounted the exchange in an article that he wrote for the fall 1996 issue of *Diplomatic History*, a scholarly quarterly. But the historian also shied away from the October Surprise controversy when he wrote a full-length book on Carter's post-presidency. Possibly sensing the career risks of even an oblique reference to the October Surprise story, Brinkley edited the incident with Arafat out of the book-length treatment of Carter's experiences.

For his part, Carter did expound a bit on his thinking about the October Surprise mystery in 2011 during an interview for another book, *Conversations with Power*, by Brian Michael Till. Carter expressed uncertainty about what actually happened but revealed that he had discussed the case with his former national security aide Gary Sick, who embraced the suspicions in a 1991 book, *October Surprise*.

"I have never taken a position on that because I don't know the facts," Carter told Till. "I've seen explanations that were made by George H.W. Bush and the Reagan people, and I've read Gary Sick's book and talked to him about it. I don't really know."

Still, Carter said he remained curious as to why the Iranians waited until immediately after Reagan was sworn in on January 20, 1981, to allow the hostages to fly out of Tehran.

"The thing that I do know is that after they [the Iranians] decided to hold the hostages until after the election, I did everything I could to get them extracted, and the last three days I was president, I never went to bed at all. I stayed up the whole time in the Oval Office to negotiate this extremely complex arrangement to get the hostages removed and to deal with \$12 billion in Iranian cash and gold.

"And I completed everything by six o'clock on the morning that I was supposed to go out of office. All the hostages were transferred to airplanes and they were waiting in the airplanes. I knew this — so they were ready to take off — and I went to the reviewing stand when Reagan became president.

"Five minutes after he was president, the planes took off. They could have left three or four hours earlier. But what, if any, influence was used on the Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini] to wait until I was out of office. I don't know."

In the interview with Till, Carter also expressed continued uncertainty as to why a crucial helicopter for the U.S. hostage-rescue operation in April 1980 turned back rather than fly on to Tehran, a decision that forced the surprise assault to be scrubbed. To carry out the mission, Carter had ordered eight helicopters to take part, including two as backups. As the mission proceeded, two helicopters developed mechanical troubles, cutting the number to the minimal of six.

But one helicopter had turned back “with no reasonable explanation,” Carter said, forcing the rescue to be called off when the number of available helicopters dropped to five. The so-called “Desert One fiasco” raised questions about Carter’s competence and ever since rumors have persisted regarding possible sabotage of the operation by military and intelligence personnel who were hostile to Carter’s presidency. But no hard evidence has ever emerged about a sabotage of Carter’s rescue operation.

In reflecting on the successful cover-ups of the Reagan-Bush-41-era, I was reminded of the insight about power from Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi. In one of her most famous speeches, “Freedom from Fear,” she noted, “It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.”

But the end result of the failed investigations into the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush meant something else for the American people. They were left wandering in a wilderness of false narratives, trying to chart their future on a map drawn by liars.

Chapter Nine: After the ‘Debunking’

After the House task force dismissed the October Surprise story as bogus in January 1993, it was open season on anyone who had dared suggest that there might be something to the allegations.

On February 3, 1993, Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Illinois, who had been the task force’s vice-chairman, gave a “special order” speech on the House floor mocking those whose early investigative work had spurred Congress to action. With rhetorical sarcasm dripping from nearly every word, the white-haired congressman repeated the usual denunciations of the October Surprise allegations as a “myth.”

But he also unintentionally revealed how fragile the task force’s conclusions were. Hyde acknowledged, for instance, that William Casey’s 1980 passport had disappeared, as had key pages of his calendar. Hyde noted, too, that French intelligence chief deMarenches had told his biographer that Casey did hold hostage talks with the Iranians in Paris in October 1980, a claim that had been corroborated by several other French intelligence officials.

But Hyde insisted that the October Surprise debunking rested firmly on two solid blocks of evidence. Hyde said the first cornerstone was the alibis for Casey and other suspects. “We were able to locate [Casey’s] whereabouts with virtual certainty” on the dates when he allegedly met with Iranians in Europe to discuss the hostages, Hyde said. Casey had been in California on the late July 1980 weekend of a purported meeting with Iranians in Madrid, Hyde said, referring to the “Bohemian Grove alibi,” which, in reality, was less rock solid and more a pile of sand.

The second debunking cornerstone, Hyde said, was the absence of anything incriminating on FBI wiretaps of the late Iranian banker Cyrus Hashemi over five months in late 1980 and early 1981. According to testimony from his brother, Jamshid, Cyrus Hashemi had strayed from an initial commitment to help the CIA and the Carter administration resolve the hostage crisis into an arrangement with the Republicans to help arrange a delay in the hostages’ release. Because Cyrus Hashemi was suspected of

illicit dealings with Iran, the FBI put him under surveillance with bugs placed in his New York office.

Referring to those FBI wiretaps, Hyde said the task force found “there is not a single indication that William Casey had contact with Cyrus or Jamshid Hashemi. ... Indeed, there is no indication on the tapes that Casey or any other individuals associated with the Reagan campaign had contact with any persons representing or associated with the Iranian government.”

But Hyde’s and the task force’s description of the FBI wiretaps was incorrect, though that was not known publicly at the time of Hyde’s speech because the FBI records were still secret in 1993. In late 1994, when I accessed the task force’s raw documents, I found a classified summary of the FBI bugging and other task force material,[\[122\]](#) which revealed that Cyrus Hashemi was enmeshed in various business schemes with Casey’s close friend and business associate, John Shaheen.

Contrary to the task force’s claim of “not a single indication” of contact between Casey and Cyrus Hashemi, the Iranian banker was recorded as boasting that he and Casey had been “close friends” for years. That claim was supported by a CIA memo which stated that Casey recruited Cyrus Hashemi into a sensitive business arrangement in 1979 involving sale of Pahlavi Foundation property, i.e. holdings controlled by the Shah of Iran.

The secret FBI summary also showed that Hashemi received a \$3 million offshore deposit, arranged by Houston lawyer Harrel Tillman, who described himself as a longtime friend of then-vice presidential candidate George H.W. Bush. In 1980, Tillman was also representing the Iranian government.[\[123\]](#) After Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in November 1980, Tillman was back on the phone promising Cyrus Hashemi help from the “Bush people” for one of Hashemi’s floundering business deals.[\[§§§§\]](#)

But none of that information was in the public domain in early 1993 as the narrative of Republican innocence was being etched into American history. Nor did the mainstream U.S. news media seem to care much that a false narrative for some of the most newsworthy events of the 1980s was being written for future generations.

The disdain for a truthful history extended beyond the October Surprise case to include the Iran-Contra scandal. Not only were those of us who had tried to find the truth about the events of 1980 treated with disdain but even Lawrence Walsh, the old-time Republican conservative with

sterling Establishment credentials dating back to the Eisenhower administration, was ridiculed for his stubborn and principled pursuit of the arms-for-hostage dealings of the mid-1980s.

After the Christmas Eve pardons in 1992, Walsh angrily protested Bush's interference in the legal process and found himself a rare voice in Washington arguing for official accountability. He said Bush's action "demonstrates that powerful people with powerful allies can commit serious crimes in high office – deliberately abusing the public trust – without consequence."

Walsh also understood how self-serving Bush's pardons had been because Bush was, in effect, ensuring that the scandal would not reach him. The Iran-Contra pardons may have represented the first time in U.S. history when a sitting President used his extraordinary pardoning power to stop an investigation in which he was a potential defendant.

Walsh, however, was deemed out of step with the prevailing Washington thinking. Much of the national press corps responded warmly to President George H.W. Bush's mass Iran-Contra pardons, even though they represented a more blatant act of obstructing justice than anything Richard Nixon had contemplated. Strikingly, the *Washington Post*, which had distinguished itself with its aggressive investigation of the Watergate cover-up, helped set the tone of acceptance for the Iran-Contra cover-up.

Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen spoke for many of his pundit colleagues when he lauded the six pardons and especially the one that spared former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger from trial. Cohen said his sympathy for Weinberger was colored by how impressed he was when he would see Weinberger in the Georgetown Safeway store, pushing his own shopping cart.

"Based on my Safeway encounters, I came to think of Weinberger as a basic sort of guy, candid and no nonsense – which is the way much of official Washington saw him," Cohen wrote. "Cap, my Safeway buddy, walks, and that's all right with me."[\[124\]](#)

By contrast, Walsh's principled stand was viewed as strange and perhaps a bit pathological. *Washington Post* writer Marjorie Williams delivered that judgment in a *Washington Post* Sunday magazine article, which read: "In the utilitarian political universe of Washington, consistency like Walsh's is distinctly suspect. It began to seem ... rigid of him to care so much. So un-Washington. Hence the gathering critique of his efforts as

vindictive, extreme. Ideological. ... But the truth is that when Walsh finally goes home, he will leave a perceived loser.”[\[125\]](#)

In other words, key elements of the U.S. news media no longer cared about getting to the bottom of complex national scandals, especially when the wrongdoing implicated powerful individuals and interests. Rather than do battle for the truth, the press corps preferred to protect the status quo, advance personal careers and proffer judgments on winners and losers. When combined with the emergence of well-funded and well-trained ideological warriors on the Right – as was occurring in the 1980s and early 1990s – the likelihood of achieving an honest narrative fell to almost nil.

Further firming up the conventional wisdom on the October Surprise case, Steven Emerson, the co-author of *The New Republic*’s misguided “debunking” article of November 1991, was let loose in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New Republic* and the *American Journalism Review* to ridicule pretty much everyone who had treated the October Surprise story seriously. And, while disparaging almost everybody else’s journalism, Emerson never mentioned how he had bungled the London alibi – arguably the biggest journalistic mistake in the entire investigation.

In some of Emerson’s articles he took special aim at me. One of his accusations was particularly curious, I thought. He questioned my journalism ethics for letting rogue Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe stay in my guest room in 1991, after he had flown into the United States from Australia for interviews with congressional investigators and journalists. While I found the accusation odd – since I know of no journalistic ethic that would prevent a reporter from giving shelter to a news source – what was even more curious was that Emerson would be aware that I had done so, since the fact was never made public.

I thought back on Ben-Menashe’s nervous suspicion that he was under surveillance after he arrived at Dulles Airport. He expressed fear that he was being followed by Israeli operatives. Given Emerson’s close ties to Israeli intelligence, it crossed my mind that he might be serving as a conduit for information that could be used to discredit journalists who dared listen to Ben-Menashe’s accounts.

After Emerson published this strange detail, I had to defend myself during an aggressive phone interview with an ABC News' reporter who was threatening to expose my alleged ethical misdeed, although the reporter couldn't cite any journalistic code that would have prohibited putting up a source in a guest room.

Another salvo from Emerson suggested that I had lied to PBS viewers when I reported that there were deletions in the versions of George H.W. Bush's Secret Service records released under the Freedom of Information Act in the early 1990s. Emerson insisted that his copies, which were also obtained under FOIA, had no deletions at all.

I found that hard to believe. So I called the Secret Service and was told that Emerson's records had redactions, too. Even Congress had received redacted versions. So, I challenged Emerson's account in letters to his editors, including one to CNN where he had been hired as an investigative reporter.

After my letter, Emerson suddenly departed CNN, and a letter from one of Emerson's law firms landed on my doorstep threatening me with a libel suit for having criticized him in letters to his editors. Apparently, I was supposed to apologize for describing Emerson as lying when he claimed to have Bush's unredacted Secret Service records, a point that he had originally made to portray me as a liar.

Faced with this legal threat and the prospect of an expensive libel case, I dug into my children's college fund to hire a lawyer, who frankly seemed to doubt that the well-regarded Emerson could be in the wrong. My response was that if Emerson actually had the unredacted records, he could simply present them, but Emerson's lawyer said that would only be done in the midst of a trial.

As the abusive and threatening letters from Emerson's lawyers continued, I decided to submit a FOIA to the Secret Service for Emerson's FOIA, i.e. I asked for exactly the same documents that the Secret Service had released to him. When those records arrived, they showed that Emerson indeed had been lying. His copies of the Secret Service records were redacted, just like those released to me and other investigators.

Finally, the threatened lawsuit went away, and Emerson was forced to admit in an interview with the media watchdog group FAIR that he never had the records he claimed. He blamed a research assistant, but never

apologized for the bullying legal strategy designed to financially bleed a journalist (myself) into confirming a lie as the truth.[\[126\]](#)

Despite having blundered regarding Casey's London alibi and having been caught in a lie over the Secret Service records, Emerson still came out of the October Surprise case with a rising reputation as a star reporter. It was a sign of the times in Washington – and inside U.S. journalism – that Emerson's reputation got a boost from his October Surprise “debunking” – as wrong and misleading as it was.

Before long, Emerson was winning more journalism awards – and was raising large sums of money to support his work from sources, such as right-wing mogul Richard Mellon Scaife. Emerson's documentary, “Jihad in America,” taking aim at the supposed danger of radical Muslims in the United States, was broadcast by PBS.

Only gradually did a few brave reporters begin criticizing Emerson over his cozy ties to right-wing Israeli officials, including Israeli intelligence officers. Typically, Emerson would hit back by issuing legal threats from his stable of high-priced lawyers. Emerson's use of lawyers to bully other journalists became part of his *modus operandi*, as *Nation* reporter Robert I. Friedman discovered in 1995 after criticizing Emerson's “Jihad in America.”

“Intellectual terrorism seems to be part of Emerson's standard repertoire,” Friedman wrote in *The Nation*. “So is his penchant for papering his critics with threatening lawyers' letters.”

Friedman also reported that Emerson hosted right-wing Israeli intelligence officials when they were in Washington. “[Yigal] Carmon, who was Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's adviser on terrorism, and [Yoram] Ettinger, who was Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu's man in the Israeli Embassy, stay in Emerson's apartment on their frequent visits to Washington,” Friedman wrote. (It was an ironic twist given Emerson's attack on me for giving shelter to Ben-Menashe.)

In 1999, a study of Emerson's record by John F. Sugg for FAIR's magazine “Extra!” quoted an *Associated Press* reporter who had worked with Emerson on a journalism project as saying of Emerson and Carmon: “I have no doubt these guys are working together.”

The Jerusalem Post reported that Emerson has “close ties to Israeli intelligence,” and “Victor Ostrovsky, who defected from Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency and has written books disclosing its secrets, calls Emerson ‘the horn’ — because he trumpets Mossad claims,” Sugg wrote. [\[127\]](#)

Emerson’s biases are better known today than they were when he was “debunking” the October Surprise allegations. He is now notorious for his Islamophobia and his “investigative journalism” that hammers away at purported dangers from “radicalized” American Muslims.

In 2010, amid the controversy over a planned Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan near the site of 9/11’s “ground zero,” Emerson went on a national radio program and claimed that Islamic cleric Feisal Abdul Rauf, the project’s leader, would likely not “survive” Emerson’s disclosure of supposedly radical comments that Rauf made a half decade earlier.

Although acknowledging that his “investigation” was incomplete, Emerson offered the listeners to Bill Bennett’s right-wing radio show “a little preview” of the allegedly offensive comments by Rauf, the cleric behind the planned Islamic center. “We have found audiotapes of Imam Rauf defending Wahhabism, the puritanical version of Islam that governs Saudi Arabia; we have found him calling for the elimination of the state of Israel by claiming he wants a one-nation state meaning no more Jewish state; we found him defending bin Laden violence.” [\[128\]](#)

However, when Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) released its evidence several days later, it fell far short of Emerson’s lurid descriptions. Rauf actually made points that are shared by many mainstream analysts – and none of the excerpted comments involved “defending Wahhabism.” As for Rauf “defending bin Laden violence,” Emerson apparently was referring to remarks that Rauf made to an audience in Australia in 2005 about the history of U.S. and Western mistreatment of people in the Middle East. [\[129\]](#)

“We tend to forget, in the West, that the United States has more Muslim blood on its hands than al-Qaeda has on its hands of innocent non-Muslims,” Rauf said. “You may remember that the U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq led to the death of over half a million Iraqi children. This has been documented by the United Nations. And when Madeleine Albright, who has become a friend of mine over the last couple of years, when she

was Secretary of State and was asked whether this was worth it, [she] said it was worth it.”

Emerson purported to “fact check” Rauf’s statement on the death toll from the Iraq sanctions by claiming “a report by the British government said at most only 50,000 deaths could be attributed to the sanctions, which were brought on by the actions by former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.” What Emerson’s “fact check” ignored, however, was that Rauf was accurately recounting Leslie Stahl’s questioning of Albright on CBS “60 Minutes” in 1996. Emerson also left out the fact that United Nations studies did conclude that those U.S.-led sanctions caused the deaths of more than 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five.

In the 1996 interview, Stahl told Albright regarding the Iraq sanctions, “We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?” Albright, who was then the U.S. ambassador to the UN, responded, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.”

Emerson didn’t identify the specific British report that contains the lower figure, although even that number – “only 50,000” – represents a stunning death toll and doesn’t contradict Rauf’s chief point, that U.S.-British actions have killed many innocent Muslims over the years. Also, by 2005, when Rauf made his remarks in Australia, the United States and Great Britain had invaded and occupied Iraq, with a death toll spiraling from tens of thousands into hundreds of thousands.

Far from “defending bin Laden violence,” Rauf’s comments simply reflected the truth about the indiscriminate killing inflicted on the Muslim world by U.S.-British military might over the years. Indeed, British imperialism in the region dates back several centuries, a point that Emerson also ignored.

Emerson next took Rauf to task for asserting that the United States has taken military action that has killed civilians and supported authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes, driving Muslims toward extremism. “Collateral damage is a nice thing to put on a paper but when the collateral damage is your own uncle or cousin, what passions do these arouse?” Rauf is quoted as saying.

“How do you negotiate? How do you tell people whose homes have been destroyed, whose lives have been destroyed, that this does not justify your actions of terrorism? It’s hard. Yes, it is true that it does not justify the

acts of bombing innocent civilians, that does not solve the problem, but after 50 years of, in many cases, oppression, of U.S. support of authoritarian regimes that have violated human rights in the most heinous of ways, how else do people get attention?”

Emerson “fact-checked” this comment by declaring, “This is justifying acts of terrorism by blaming the United States for the oppression of Islamic regimes of their own citizens. This also ignores U.S. aid of Muslim citizens in nations such as Kosovo and Kuwait.”

However, any fair-minded observer would agree with Rauf that the United States has supported many brutal and undemocratic leaders of Muslim countries, including Egypt under Hosni Mubarak, Saudi Arabia under a corrupt monarchy, Iran under the Shah, and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq during the 1980s. Even President George W. Bush might agree with Rauf. One of Bush’s key arguments for “regime change” in the Middle East was the need for the United States to finally stop coddling dictators because their repressive practices were a central ingredient in the toxic brew that contributed to terrorism.

In 2011, Emerson also took credit for helping to organize the controversial hearings by Rep. Peter King, R-New York, on the alleged radicalization of American Muslims. Emerson boasted about his role but also lashed out at King for not including him on the witness list. In a bizarre letter to King, Emerson vowed to withhold further assistance as retaliation for the snub.

“I was even going to bring in a special guest today and a VERY informed and connected source, who could have been very useful, possibly even critical to your hearing, but he too will not attend unless I do,” Emerson wrote. “You have caved in to the demands of radical Islamists in removing me as a witness.”

In a weird twist on reality, Emerson somehow envisioned himself as the victim of McCarthyism because he wasn’t being allowed to go before the House Homeland Security Committee and accuse large segments of the American-Muslim community of being un-American.[\[130\]](#)

Several months later, the Center for American Progress sponsored a report on Emerson and other Muslim-bashers. The context was the aftermath of a murderous rampage in Norway by Christian terrorist Anders Breivik, who cited their writings in a manifesto justifying his killing of 77 people, including many young people at a summer camp, on July 22, 2011.

Breivik considered the slaughter the beginning of a war against “multiculturalists” who preach tolerance of Muslims.

CAP’s report, entitled “Fear, Inc.,” noted a number of Emerson’s falsehoods and exaggerations about American Muslims and examined the convoluted financing of Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism, which has drawn substantial support from right-wing foundations and funders whose political interests benefited from a surging right-wing campaign against Muslims.

“Emerson’s nonprofit organization IPT received a total of \$400,000 from Donors Capital Fund in 2007 and 2008, as well as \$100,000 from the Becker Foundation, and \$250,000 from Daniel Pipes’ Middle East Forum, according to our research,” the report said.

“Emerson’s nonprofit organization, in turn, helps fund his for-profit company, SAE Productions. IPT paid SAE Productions \$3.33 million to enable the company to ‘study alleged ties between American Muslims and overseas terrorism.’ Emerson is SAE’s sole employee.

“Even more intriguingly, a review of grants in November 2010 showed large sums of money contributed to the ‘Investigative Project,’ or ‘IPT,’ care of the Counterterrorism & Security Education and Research Foundation [CTSERF]. An examination of CTSERF’s 990 forms [reports that non-profits file with the Internal Revenue Service] showed that, much like the Investigative Project, all grant revenue was transferred to a private, for-profit entity, the International Association of Counterterrorism and Security Professionals [IACSP]. Emerson did not respond to requests for comment by time of publication.

“The Russell Berrie Foundation has contributed \$2,736,000 to CTSERF, and Richard Scaife foundations contributed \$1,575,000. While neither the IPT, CTSERF, or IACSP websites make any mention of a link between CTSERF and the IPT, Ray Locker, the Investigative Project’s managing director, told the LobeLog blog that a relationship ‘exists’ and ‘it’s all above board and passes muster with the IRS.’ ...

“Steven Fustero, chief executive of CTSERF, told LobeLog, ‘The research and education designated funds are [...] transferred to IACSP, which in turn makes the research grants,’ but would not discuss the relationship between CTSERF and IPT. An examination of CTSERF tax documents from 1999 to 2008 shows the group receiving \$11,108,332 in grant revenue and transferring \$12,206,900 to IACSP.

“This kind of action enrages Ken Berger, president of Charity Navigator, a nonprofit watchdog group. He argued that ‘basically, you have a nonprofit acting as a front organization, and all that money going to a for-profit.’

“The increasing influence of Islamophobia donors to Emerson’s nonprofit and for-profit work has focused more recently on anti-Islam, anti-Muslim expertise. Indeed, according to an investigation by *The Tennessean* newspaper, the Investigative Project now solicits money by telling donors they’re in imminent danger from Muslims.”

In the two decades after *The New Republic*’s October Surprise “debunking” article, the public also has learned more about the magazine’s commitment to quality “journalism,” through such debacles as the serial fraud of its correspondent Stephen Glass.

And, publisher Martin Peretz exposed more about his personal agenda. He lives part time in Israel and — like Emerson — has taken to smearing Muslims, such as in a TNR blog post regarding the proposed Islamic community center in Lower Manhattan.

Peretz declared: “Frankly, Muslim life is cheap, most notably to Muslims. And among those Muslims led by the Imam Rauf [the promoter of the Islamic center] there is hardly one who has raised a fuss about the routine and random bloodshed that defines their brotherhood. So, yes, I wonder whether I need honor these people and pretend that they are worthy of the privileges of the First Amendment which I have in my gut the sense that they will abuse.”

Facing accusations of racism, Peretz later issued a half-hearted apology which insisted that his reference to Muslim life being cheap was “a statement of fact, not opinion.”

A *New York Times* magazine profile of Peretz noted that Peretz’s hostility toward Muslims was nothing new. “As early as 1988, Peretz was courting danger in *The New Republic* with disturbing Arab stereotypes not terribly different from his 2010 remarks,” wrote Stephen Rodrick. [[131](#)]

The arrival of the Reagan presidency in 1981 had another powerful effect on the future of the U.S. government. President Reagan opened the door to the credentialing of the neoconservatives, a movement of foreign policy intellectuals who emerged in the 1970s largely from the nasty sectarian clashes on the American Left.

Some early neocons had been followers of Leon Trotsky, who advocated a worldwide communist revolution, and thus detested the more pragmatic Stalinists who focused on building communism first in the Soviet Union. As Josef Stalin imposed his iron grip on the Soviet Union, Trotsky fled into exile and was assassinated by a Soviet agent in Mexico on August 21, 1940. Some of Trotsky's embittered followers found common cause with the fiercely anti-communist American Right in a mutual desire to destroy the Soviet Union.

Other neocons had been Cold War liberal Democrats in the 1960s but veered to the Republicans amid the Democratic Party split over the Vietnam War. President Nixon's success in thwarting President Johnson's peace initiatives in 1968 – and in extending the war for four more years – served to deepen the Democratic divisions between anti-war and pro-war factions with some pro-war Democrats evolving into neocons who were more comfortable with the more militaristic Republican foreign policy.

Many neocons also were devoted to Israel and its interests as an embattled Jewish state in the Arab Middle East. Sharing Begin's distrust and contempt of Carter in 1979-1980, American neocons were equally determined to block Carter's plans for a Palestinian state – as well as his second term.

The various neocon traits – their intellectual arrogance, their intense ideology and their messianic attitudes about Israel – combined to make the neocons a small but formidable movement. It was also one that appreciated how information could be manipulated to achieve political ends. The Trotskyite movement had cut its teeth on the concepts of revolutionary propaganda, or agit-prop, used to excite, mobilize and direct the masses. The political struggle over the Vietnam War had rekindled similar notions of how propaganda could be deployed to support the war or rally opposition to it.

The younger generation of neocons forged their identity in campus conflicts between the often strident anti-war New Left and the more traditionalist Cold War Democrats. The intense devotion that some

American Jewish neocons felt toward Israel's security added a religious element to a cause that justified almost any distortion of fact if needed to control the political narrative. Information had become the battlefield for what the neocons liked to call the "war of ideas." Truth was simply collateral damage.

As battle-hardened intellectuals adept at ideological warfare, the neocons came to view themselves as a vanguard with special gifts of intelligence and leadership that made them superior to the average American. Some neocons followed the elitist political philosophy of Leo Strauss, although the vanguard concept also was part of Marxist-Leninist teachings. The idea of the vanguard was always profoundly antidemocratic, even as the neocons styled themselves as grand promoters of democracy. The democratic precept that an informed electorate could be trusted to make wise choices for the nation was cast aside in favor of a concept that a special group of enlightened policymakers, i.e. the neocons, should guide the public to the proper conclusions.

In the 1980s, this neocon notion gave rise to phrases like "perception management," the idea that the perceptions of the average Americans had to be managed to bring them into line with the overriding goals of the neocons and their right-wing allies. That is one reason why neocons are infamous for exaggerating threats to the United States, from hyping the dangers from a collapsing Soviet Union in the 1980s to warning about nonexistent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to whipping up fears about Islamists imposing Shariah law on U.S. cities.

Critics of the neocons often view them as more benighted than intelligent, more dogmatic than realistic, more true-believing than analytical. Jacob Heilbrunn wrote in his book about the neocons, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* that "the neoconservatives are less intellectuals than prophets. They tend to be men (and women) of an uncompromising temperament who use (and treat) ideas as weapons in a moral struggle, which is why the political class in each party regards them with a mixture of appreciation and apprehension, even loathing."

Given their penchant for deception, the neocons always leave behind questions about what they really believe. Are they spouting their alarmist distortions because they actually believe them or for effect?

However, if the neocons had not made themselves useful, they might have remained a fringe group on the edges of Washington power. But the

neocons learned how to bend their ideology to more practical political pursuits, such as undercutting President Carter in 1980, an accomplishment that earned them a place of genuine influence inside the Republican Party.

Political operatives with strong neocon tendencies – such as Laurence Silberman, Robert McFarlane, Fred Ikle, Richard Perle and Michael Ledeen – buzzed around the October Surprise operations. Some were members of the Reagan campaign’s “October Surprise Group,” responsible for developing strategy to counter “any last-minute foreign policy or defense-related event, including the release of the hostages, that might favorably impact President Carter in the November election,” according to a draft of the House October Surprise task force’s report that I found among the unpublished files.

The draft report said the “October Surprise Group” consisted of Richard V. Allen, Charles M. Kupperman, Thomas H. Moorer, Eugene V. Rostow, William R. Van Cleave, Fred C. Ikle, John R. Lehman Jr., Robert G. Neumann, Laurence Silberman and Seymour Weiss. While that part of the draft made it into the task force’s final report, another part was deleted, which said: “According to members of the ‘October Surprise’ group, the following individuals also participated in meetings although they were not considered ‘members’ of the group: Michael Ledeen, Richard Stillwell, William Middendorf, Richard Perle, General Louis Walt and Admiral James Holloway.”[\[132\]](#)

The mix of neocons and establishment figures (note the name of Eugene Rostow who had served in President Johnson’s State Department) underscored how difficult it would be to ever establish the truth about what the Reagan campaign did in 1980. Too many important people could have faced embarrassment if not worse. Indeed, by the early 1990s – when the October Surprise investigation was under way – neocons had been near the center of American power for more than a decade. They had become part of the Republican establishment, with key allies in the Democratic Party as well as in the national press corps.

Since the 1970s, many of the neocons had cultivated important friendships with politicians and professionals from both major parties. Wealthy right-wingers poured money into influential neocon think tanks, like the American Enterprise Institute [AEI] and the Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], which, in turn, flattered politicians with

speaking assignments and promoted friendly pundits. In short, the neocons mastered the Washington game.

A prototype of this neocon operative was Michael Ledeen, who straddled the worlds of journalism, think tanks and government. Having worked at CSIS, he wrote for publications such as *The New Republic* and collaborated with Western intelligence services. In 1980, Ledeen worked with former CIA official Ted Shackley (a close confidante of George H.W. Bush) on a “war game” for SISMI, the right-wing Italian intelligence service.

In late October, Ledeen co-wrote a damaging story for *The New Republic* alleging that President Carter’s brother Billy accepted \$50,000 in unreported payments from Libya and held meetings with Palestinian leaders George Habash and Yasser Arafat. The story, whose accuracy was disputed by Billy Carter and a special Senate subcommittee that had investigated the President’s brother,[\[133\]](#) was leaked by SISMI in an apparent move to undermine Carter’s campaign. Ledeen’s article appeared in *The New Republic* without mentioning that Ledeen was working for SISMI.[\[134\]](#)

While writing for *The New Republic*, Ledeen also was sending memos to the Reagan-Bush campaign urging more aggressive attacks on Carter over the hostage crisis. A two-page memo, written by Ledeen and entitled “Notes on Iran,” was discovered by the House task force.

“Election Day is the first anniversary of the seizure of the American hostages in Teheran,” Ledeen wrote. “The voters of this country are entitled to answers to the basic questions surrounding this act of national humiliation. Why were our men and women in Tehran not protected? ... The seizure of the hostages, terrible though it is, was just one act in a terrible drama that humiliated this country throughout the world.”[\[135\]](#)

Ledeen’s memo may have been part of his work as an informal member of the Reagan campaign’s “October Surprise Group,” which he was reported to have joined – along with another important neocon, Richard Perle – without being added to the formal roster, according to the House task force’s draft report. The draft also mentioned a September 16, 1980, meeting on the “Persian Gulf Project” involving senior campaign officials, including William Casey and Richard Allen. According to the draft and Allen’s notes, Ledeen participated in that meeting.

After Reagan's election, Ledeen went to work as a consultant to the State Department and the National Security Council, where he emerged as a key early figure in the Iran-Contra scandal. But Ledeen benefited from years of networking inside Washington, developing an imposing set of allies who would help him out of tight spots.

One of Ledeen's friends was none other than the House task force's chief counsel Lawrence Barcella. The Barcella-Ledeen relationship began when Barcella sold a house to Ledeen and the two aspiring Washington professionals shared a housekeeper. According to Peter Maas's book *Manhunt* about Barcella's work as a prosecutor chasing rogue CIA officer Edwin Wilson, Ledeen approached Barcella about the investigation in 1982. Ledeen, then a State Department consultant on terrorism, was concerned that two of his associates, former CIA officer Ted Shackley and Pentagon official Erich von Marbod, had come under suspicion in the Wilson case.

"I told Larry that I can't imagine that Shackley [or von Marbod] would be involved in what you are investigating," Ledeen told me in an interview years later. "I wasn't trying to influence what he [Barcella] was doing. This is a community in which people help friends understand things."

Barcella also saw nothing wrong with the out-of-channel approach. "He wasn't telling me to back off," Barcella told me. "He just wanted to add his two-cents worth." However, Shackley and von Marbod were dropped from the Wilson investigation.

A decade later, when Ledeen's role in the October Surprise case was under review, a similar scenario played out, although this time it was Ledeen urging that he himself be dropped from the investigation. "Yes, I believe I spoke to Larry Barcella about the October Surprise investigation," Ledeen told me in an e-mail exchange years later. "And I undoubtedly told him what I have always said, namely that, to the best of my knowledge, the October Surprise theory is nonsense." After that conversation, both references to Ledeen in the October Surprise draft report were removed from the final report.

By advising Barcella on the final report, Ledeen also may have helped protect his associate, Ted Shackley, once again. Shackley, the legendary "blond ghost," was another victim of the Carter administration's post-Vietnam downsizing of the CIA's operations directorate, after he had run many of the CIA's most controversial paramilitary operations in Vietnam and Laos as well as the JMWAVE operations against Fidel Castro's Cuba.

Under CIA Director George H.W. Bush in 1976, Shackley had received an appointment to a top clandestine job, associate deputy director for operations. “For that period, Bush did a remarkable job,” Theodore Shackley gushed in an interview with me. “He was very warm, very human, very interested. You could get in to see him without difficulty.”

When Bush ran for president (and then vice president) in 1980, Shackley worked for his former boss, though staying in the shadows as usual. In an unauthorized biography, *Blond Ghost*, author David Corn wrote that Shackley approached Bush for a position in the campaign in August 1980, after Reagan had picked Bush as his vice presidential nominee. But other sources said Shackley’s informal assistance to Bush’s campaign dated back earlier and was more intensive. “Rafael Quintero [an anti-Castro Cuban with close ties to the CIA] was saying that Shackley met with Bush every week,” Corn wrote.

Bush’s reliance on Shackley for sensitive missions was reflected in a notation by Reagan’s national security aide Richard Allen that I found among the October Surprise documents. According to the note, dated October 27, 1980, Bush received a tip from John Connally, the former Democratic Texas governor who had broken with his party to join Richard Nixon’s Cabinet. As Campaign 1980 entered its final days, Connally heard a rumor from Middle East sources that President Carter might have made progress on a deal with Iran after all.

Bush instructed Allen to get on top of the matter and relay any information about possible October Surprise developments to “Ted Shacklee [sic] via Jennifer.” Allen said the Jennifer was Jennifer Fitzgerald, Bush’s longtime assistant including during his year at the CIA. Allen testified that “Shacklee” was Theodore Shackley.[\[136\]](#)

The evidence that Bush and Shackley were working together on the Iranian hostage crisis in 1980 makes more credible other claims of involvement by CIA personnel who had been close to Shackley. For instance, Donald Gregg, a CIA officer alleged to have participated in Republican meetings with Iranians, served under Shackley’s command in Vietnam.

Several years into the Reagan administration, Shackley also played a role in the early Iran-Contra business, meeting with Hassan Karrubi, the brother of Khomeini aide Mehdi Karrubi, in Hamburg, Germany, in 1984. But the information on Shackley’s role in the October Surprise case,

blending into Iran-Contra, also was left on the editing room floor when Barcella's final report was published in January 1993. [\[*****\]](#)

Barcella, who volunteered for the October Surprise job in 1991, always seemed to be an odd choice for chief counsel because of his various conflicts of interest. Besides his friendship with Ledeen, Barcella had represented the criminal Pakistani-based Bank of Credit and Commerce International, which also had a tie-in to the October Surprise case. The FBI discovered that BCCI was making a mysterious payment to Iranian double-agent Cyrus Hashemi in early February 1981, in the weeks after Ronald Reagan's Inauguration and the simultaneous release of the American hostages.

In the late 1980s, Barcella had worked as a lead attorney for BCCI, which paid Barcella and his firm more than \$2 million. The lead partner in the firm was former Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nevada, who had served as chairman of the Reagan-Bush campaign in 1980.

As with the disappeared Ledeen and Shackley references, the evidence of a BCCI payoff to Hashemi also was left out of the task force's final report.

Chapter Ten: Trust Colin Powell?

The danger that false narratives present to a country is not only that the people can be led into erroneous conclusions based on bogus history. Another risk is that the country will trust the wrong guides, not realizing that some of the respected individuals pointing the way to the future are the same ones who secretly helped bury the truth about the past.

Indeed, false narratives are often extended into the future through the behavior of individuals who emerge wiping their soiled – or blood-covered – hands while insisting that their hands were never dirty in the first place. They are like the charming sociopaths in movies who ingratiate themselves with the police, ever helpful and polite, and who are overlooked even while misdirecting authorities or plotting new crimes.

One of the most notorious modern examples of America's misplaced trust came on February 5, 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell, then one of the most respected people in America, went before the United Nations and gave one of the most dishonest speeches in recent history. Powell offered an elaborate exposition of the supposed evidence proving that Iraq possessed stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, plus the motive and means to use them in terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies.

If the speech had been delivered by anyone other than Powell, it surely would have had much less effect in wiping away the last vestiges of resistance to President George W. Bush's plan to invade Iraq the next month. That evening and the next day, influential U.S. news outlets were filled with high praise for Powell and his speech. There was a consensus that not only treated Powell's allegations as unassailable but portrayed remaining doubters as delusional, dishonest or disloyal.

Because of his golden image as a supposedly principled African-American military officer who had risen through the ranks to hold a number of senior posts (often the first black to do so), Powell was widely regarded as one of the era's Wise Men. But his glowing press clippings never matched his actual history, as I learned when I investigated his career in the mid-1990s.

I discovered that Powell was one of the chief beneficiaries of the false narratives that had come to define the era of Reagan and the Bushes. If people had known how Powell actually executed his climb to the top, they would have been far more suspicious of his WMD assertions regarding Iraq. But that real story was little known to the general public. Few perceived Powell for what he really was: a yes man, a striver who would go with the flow, a careerist who set aside moral qualms when he was tapped by a superior to implement a wrongheaded policy, an opportunist who would willingly conceal the truth and cover up a crime.

Powell had been fulfilling this sense of “duty” since the Vietnam War when – during his first tour in 1963 as an adviser to a South Vietnamese army unit – he took part in punitive destruction of villages in Viet Cong strongholds and saw nothing wrong with the brutal practice, as he explained in his memoir, *My American Journey*.

“We burned down the thatched huts, starting the blaze with Ronson and Zippo lighters,” Powell recalled. “Why were we torching houses and destroying crops? Ho Chi Minh had said the people were like the sea in which his guerrillas swam. ... We tried to solve the problem by making the whole sea uninhabitable. In the hard logic of war, what difference did it make if you shot your enemy or starved him to death?”

Then, during his second tour in 1968, as an executive officer for the Americal Division, Powell was asked to investigate U.S. abuses of South Vietnamese civilians and Viet Cong prisoners. The allegations encompassed the My Lai massacre, which had occurred on March 16, 1968, when a bloodied unit of the Americal Division stormed into a hamlet known as My Lai 4.

Revenge-seeking American soldiers roused Vietnamese civilians – mostly old men, women and children – from their thatched huts and herded them into the village’s irrigation ditches. As the round-up continued, some Americans raped the girls. Then, under orders from junior officers on the ground, soldiers began emptying their M-16s into the terrified peasants. The slaughter raged for four hours, killing a total of 347 Vietnamese, including babies.

Several months later, a young Americal soldier named Tom Glen complained to the high command about the division’s systematic mistreatment of the Vietnamese people. Glen reported that many Vietnamese were fleeing from Americans who “for mere pleasure, fire

indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves.” Glen’s letter didn’t mention the My Lai massacre specifically, though Glen later told me that he had heard about it and considered it just one part of the abusive routine that he had witnessed.

Powell, then a fast-rising Army major, was assigned the job of investigating Glen’s accusations. He did so without questioning Glen or assigning anyone else to do so. Powell simply accepted a claim from Glen’s superior officer that Glen was not close enough to the front lines to know what he was saying, an assertion Glen denied when I spoke with him decades later.

After a cursory investigation, Powell responded to Glen’s complaint on December 13, 1968. Powell said there had been no pattern of wrongdoing. “There may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs,” Powell wrote. But “this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the Division. ... In direct refutation of this [Glen’s] portrayal ... is the fact that relations between American soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent.”

It would take more time and another American veteran, an infantryman named Ron Ridenhour, to piece together the awful truth about the atrocity at My Lai. After returning to the United States, Ridenhour interviewed American comrades who had participated in the massacre. On his own, Ridenhour compiled this shocking information into a report and forwarded it to the Army inspector general.

The IG’s office conducted a serious investigation, in contrast to Powell’s breezy review. Courts martial were held against officers and enlisted men who were implicated in the My Lai massacre. However, luckily for Powell, Glen’s letter and his response disappeared into the National Archives – to be unearthed only years later by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sims for their book, *Four Hours in My Lai*.

As Powell ascended through the ranks – tapped for success as what the Army called a “water-walker” – he also shielded one of his friends, an American general who was accused of taking helicopter rides over Quang Ngai province to hunt down and murder Vietnamese civilians from the air as a kind of sport. In a court martial proceeding, Powell sided with Brig. Gen. John W. Donaldson, who was accused by helicopter pilots who had taken him on his hunts.

Years later, I interviewed a senior Army investigator from the Donaldson case who still spoke with a raw disgust about the behavior of senior Americal officers. “They used to bet in the morning how many people they could kill – old people, civilians, it didn’t matter,” said the investigator, who asked not to be identified by name.

However, Powell had worked with Donaldson for eight months in 1968-1969 and rallied to the general’s defense when Donaldson was charged with murder on June 2, 1971. Powell submitted an affidavit dated August 10, 1971, which lauded Donaldson as “an aggressive and courageous brigade commander.” Powell did not specifically refer to the murder allegations, but added that helicopter forays in Vietnam had been an “effective means of separating hostiles from the general population.”

The old Army investigator told me that “we had him [Donaldson] dead to rights,” with the testimony of two helicopter pilots who had flown Donaldson on his shooting expeditions. But the investigation collapsed when the two pilot-witnesses were transferred to another Army base and apparently came under pressure from military superiors. The two pilots withdrew their testimony, and the Army dropped all charges against Donaldson.

Though Powell didn’t mention his role in the My Lai cover-up or his support for Gen. Donaldson in *My American Journey*, he did offer a chilling excuse for cold-blooded murder of Vietnamese.

“I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male,” Powell wrote. “If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen [West Germany], Lt. Col. Walter Pritchard, was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong.”

Yes, combat is brutal but the intentional slaughter of unarmed civilians is not combat. It is a war crime. Plus, the deaths of fellow soldiers cannot become an excuse to murder civilians. That was precisely the rationalization that the My Lai killers cited in their own defense. Yet, when Powell included these passages in his 1996 memoir, the mainstream

reviewers – who almost universally fawned over the book – ignored these troubling passages in which Powell defended war crimes.

As Powell climbed his way through the military officer ranks, he carefully avoided taking any principled stands that might have dented his career. He didn't join early Army advisers in South Vietnam who warned President Lyndon Johnson about the looming catastrophe; he didn't move aggressively to investigate My Lai and other war crimes when he had the chance; and he certainly didn't associate with later Vietnam veterans who denounced the brutality of the war.

Even in retrospect, later in his career, Powell only adopted the politically safe Republican position of complaining that the big mistake in Vietnam was that civilian leaders should not have restrained the military high command. For Powell, his Vietnam past would be his prologue.

After Ronald Reagan ousted Jimmy Carter in 1980, Col. Powell was ready for his big surge to the top of the Pentagon's ladder. Powell had gotten to know Caspar Weinberger and Frank Carlucci when they worked for Richard Nixon's White House and Powell held a prized White House fellowship. In 1981, when Weinberger and Carlucci took over the Defense Department as secretary of defense and deputy secretary of defense, respectively, Powell was perfectly placed at the Pentagon to greet his old mentors.

To get Powell his first general star, Carlucci arranged brief assignments for Powell at Army bases in Kansas and Colorado before bringing him back to the Pentagon in 1983 to be military assistant to Secretary Weinberger. Thus, in 1985, when the Iran-Contra arms shipments were beginning, Powell was there serving as Weinberger's "filter," handling the paperwork and setting up meetings.

Powell received the draft presidential order in June 1985 that Reagan's National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane was circulating regarding a proposed overture to supposed Iranian moderates. In his memoir, Powell called the proposal "a stunner" and a grab by McFarlane for "Kissingerian immortality." After reading the draft, Weinberger scribbled in the margins, "this is almost too absurd to comment on."

On June 30, 1985, as the paper was circulating inside the administration, Reagan declared that the United States would give no

quarter to terrorism. "Let me further make it plain to the assassins in Beirut and their accomplices, wherever they may be, that America will never make concessions to terrorists," the President said.

But in July 1985, Weinberger, Powell and McFarlane met to discuss details for doing just that, seeking Iran's help in arranging the release of U.S. hostages held in Lebanon. Iran wanted 100 anti-tank TOW missiles that would be delivered through Israel, according to Weinberger's notes. Reagan gave his approval, but the White House wanted to keep the operation a closely held secret. The shipments were to be handled with "maximum compartmentalization," the notes said.

On August 20, 1985, the Israelis delivered the first 96 missiles to Iran. It was at that moment, the Reagan administration and the officials personally involved stepped over an important legal line. The transfer violated laws requiring congressional notification for shipment of U.S. weapons and prohibiting arms to Iran or any other nation designated a terrorist state. Violation of either statute could be a felony.

Arguably, President Reagan could have circumvented those laws if he had issued a finding declaring the shipment to be a covert action, but he hadn't done so. He and his team were going outside the law and the evidence indicates that Weinberger and Powell were participants, even if they may have thought the arms-to-Iran policy was a bad idea.

According to the Iran-Contra evidence, Israel notified McFarlane about the completed shipment on August 22, two days after the first delivery. From aboard Air Force One, McFarlane called Weinberger. When Air Force One landed at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, McFarlane rushed to the Pentagon to meet Weinberger and Powell. The 40-minute meeting started at 7:30 p.m.

That much is known from the Iran-Contra public record, but the substance of the conversation remains in dispute. McFarlane said he discussed Reagan's approval of the missile transfer with Weinberger and Powell, and the need to replenish Israeli stockpiles. That would have put Weinberger and Powell in the middle of a criminal conspiracy. But Weinberger denied McFarlane's account, and Powell insisted that he had only a fuzzy memory of the meeting without a clear recollection of any completed arms shipment.

"My recollection is that Mr. McFarlane described to the Secretary [Weinberger] the so-called Iran Initiative and he gave to the Secretary a sort

of a history of how we got where we were that particular day and some of the thinking that gave rise to the possibility of going forward ... and what the purposes of such an initiative would be,” Powell said in an Iran-Contra deposition two years later.[\[137\]](#)

Congressional attorney Joseph Saba asked Powell if McFarlane had mentioned that Israel already had supplied weapons to Iran. “I don’t recall specifically,” Powell answered. “I just don’t recall.”

In a later interview with the FBI, Powell said he learned at that meeting with McFarlane that there “was to be a transfer of some limited amount of materiel” to Iran. But he did not budge on his claim of ignorance about the crucial fact that the first shipment had already gone and that the Reagan administration had promised the Israelis replenishment for the shipped missiles.

This claim of only prospective knowledge of future arms shipments, not past knowledge of completed transfers, would be key to Powell’s Iran-Contra defense. But it made little sense for McFarlane to learn of Israel’s August 1985 missile delivery to Iran and the need for replenishment of the Israeli stockpiles, then hurry to the Pentagon, only to debate a future policy that was already underway. The behavior of Powell and Weinberger in the following days also suggested that they knew an arms-for-hostage swap was in progress.

According to Weinberger’s diary, he and Powell eagerly awaited a release of an American hostage in Lebanon, the payoff for the clandestine weapons shipment to Iran. In early September 1985, Weinberger dispatched a Pentagon emissary to meet with Iranians in Europe, another step that would seem to make little sense if Weinberger and Powell were indeed in the dark about the details of the arms-for-hostage operation. At the same time, McFarlane told Israel that the United States was prepared to replace 500 Israeli missiles, an assurance that would have required Weinberger’s clearance since the missiles would be coming from Defense Department stockpiles over which Weinberger had direct authority.

On September 14, 1985, Israel delivered the second shipment, 408 more missiles to Iran. The next day, one hostage, the Rev. Benjamin Weir, was released in Beirut. Back at the Pentagon, Weinberger penned in his diary a cryptic reference to “a delivery I have for our prisoners.”

But when the Iran-Contra scandal broke more than a year later, Weinberger and Powell would plead faulty memories about the Weir case,

too. Attorney Saba asked Powell if he knew of a linkage between an arms delivery and Weir's release. "No, I have no recollection of that," Powell answered.

After Weir's freedom, the job of replenishing the Israel missiles fell to White House aide Oliver North, who turned to Powell for logistical assistance. "My original point of contact was General Colin Powell, who was going directly to his immediate superior, Secretary Weinberger," North testified in 1987.

But in their later sworn testimony, Powell and Weinberger continued to insist that they had no idea that 508 missiles had already been shipped via Israel to Iran and that Israel was expecting replenishment of its stockpiles. Powell stuck to that story even as evidence emerged that he and Weinberger read top-secret intelligence intercepts in September and October 1985 in which Iranians described the U.S. arms delivery.

One of those reports, dated October 2, 1985, and marked with the high-level classification, "SECRET SPOKE ORCON," was signed by Lt. Gen. William Odom, the director of the National Security Agency. According to Odom's report, a sensitive electronic intercept had picked up a phone conversation a day earlier between two Iranian officials, identified as "Mr. Asghari" who was in Europe and "Mohsen Kangarlu" who was in Tehran.

"A large part of the conversation had to do with details on the delivery of several more shipments of weapons into Iran," wrote Odom. "Asghari then pressed Kangarlu to provide a list of what he wanted the 'other four planes' to bring. ... Kangarlu said that he already had provided a list. Asghari said that those items were for the first two planes. Asghari reminded Kangarlu that there were Phoenix missiles on the second plane which were not on the first. ... [Asghari] said that a flight would be made this week."

In 1987, when congressional Iran-Contra investigators asked about the intercepts and other evidence of Pentagon knowledge, Powell again pleaded a weak memory. He repeatedly used phrases such as "I cannot specifically recall." At one point, Powell said, "To my recollection, I don't have a recollection."

In the next phase of the Iran arms-for-hostages deal – the direct delivery of U.S. missiles to the Islamic fundamentalist government – Powell would play an even bigger role. Indeed, without his persistence, the disastrous policy might never have happened, or might have ended much sooner at much less damage to the U.S. government.

In early 1986, Powell exploited his bureaucratic skills to short-circuit the Pentagon's covert procurement safeguards installed to prevent abuses of the clandestine supply networks. Defense procurement officials said that without Powell's manipulation of the process, the Pentagon's internal auditing systems would have alerted the military brass that thousands of TOW anti-tank missiles and other sophisticated weaponry were headed to Iran, which was designated a terrorist state.

But Powell slipped the missiles and other hardware out of U.S. Army inventories while hiding from key Pentagon officials where the equipment was going. How Powell pulled off this scheme can be found in thousands of pages of Iran-Contra depositions from Pentagon officials, a trove of evidence that never received serious U.S. news media attention.

Powell insisted that he and Weinberger minimized the Pentagon's role, delivering the missiles to the CIA under the Economy Act, which regulates transfers between government agencies. "We treated the TOW transfer like garbage to be gotten out of the house quickly," Powell wrote in *My American Journey*.

But Powell's Economy Act argument was disingenuous, because the Pentagon always uses the Economy Act when it moves weapons to the CIA. Powell's account obscured his unusual actions in arranging the shipments without giving senior officers the information that Pentagon procedures required, even for sensitive covert activities.

Weinberger officially handed Powell the job of shipping the missiles to Iran on January 17, 1986, after Reagan belatedly signed a formal intelligence finding, authorizing the transfer of arms from U.S. stockpiles to Iran. In sworn testimony, Powell dated his first knowledge of the missile transfers to this moment. He continued to claim a fuzzy memory of everything before.

A day after Reagan's finding, Powell instructed Gen. Max Thurman, then acting Army chief of staff, to prepare for a transfer of 4,000 TOW anti-tank missiles, but Powell made no mention that they were headed to Iran. "I

gave him absolutely no indication of the destination of the missiles,” Powell testified.

Though kept in the dark, Thurman began the process of transferring the TOWs to the CIA, the first step of the journey. Powell’s orders “bypassed the formal [covert procedures] on the ingress line,” Thurman acknowledged in Iran-Contra testimony. “The first shipment is made without a complete wring-out through all of the procedural steps.”[\[138\]](#)

As Powell’s strange orders rippled through the top echelon of the Pentagon, Lt. Gen. Vincent M. Russo, the assistant deputy chief of staff for logistics, called Powell to ask about the operation. Powell immediately circumvented Russo’s inquiry by arranging “executive instructions” that commanded Russo to deliver the first 1,000 TOWs, no questions asked.

“It was a little unusual,” commented then Army chief of staff, Gen. John A. Wickham Jr. “All personal visit or secure phone call, nothing in writing – because normally through the [covert logistics office] a procedure is established so that records are kept in a much more formal process. ... I felt very uneasy about this process. And I also felt uneasy about the notification dimension to the Congress.”[\[139\]](#)

Under federal law, the Executive was required to notify Congress both of covert action “findings” and the transfer of military equipment to third countries. However, on January 29, 1986, thanks to Powell’s intervention, 1,000 U.S. TOWs were loaded onto pallets at Redstone Arsenal and transferred to the airfield at Anniston, Alabama. As the shipment progressed, senior Pentagon officers grew nervous about Powell withholding the destination and other details.

The logistics personnel also wanted proof that somebody was paying for the missiles. Major Christopher Simpson, who was making the flight arrangements, later told Iran-Contra investigators that Gen. Russo “was very uncomfortable with no paperwork to support the mission request. He wasn’t going to do nothin’, as he said, without seeing some money. ... ‘no tickey, no laundry.’”

The money for the first shipment was finally deposited into a CIA account in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 11, 1986. Three days later, Russo released the 1,000 TOWs. Inside the Pentagon, however, concern grew about Powell’s unorthodox arrangements and the identity of the missile recipients. Major Simpson told congressional investigators that he would have rung alarm bells if he had known the TOWs were headed to

Iran. “In the three years that I had worked there, I had been instructed ... by the leadership ... never to do anything illegal, and I would have felt that we were doing something illegal,” Simpson said.[\[140\]](#)

Even without knowing that the missiles were going to Iran, Simpson expressed concern about whether the requirement to notify Congress had been met. He got advice from a Pentagon lawyer that the 1986 intelligence authorization act, which mandated a “timely” notice to Congress on foreign arms transfers, had an “impact on this particular mission.” The issue was bumped up to Secretary of the Army John Marsh.

Though still blind to the shipment’s destination, the Army high command was inclined to stop the strange operation in its tracks. At this key juncture, Powell intervened again. Simpson said, “General Powell was asking General Russo to reassure the Secretary of the Army that notification was being handled, ... that it had been addressed and it was taken care of.” Yet, despite Powell’s assurance, Congress had not been notified.[\[141\]](#)

Army Secretary Marsh shared the skepticism about Powell’s operation. On February 25, 1986, Marsh called a meeting of senior Army officers and ordered Russo to “tell General Powell of my concern with regard to adequate notification being given to Congress,” Russo testified.[\[142\]](#)

Army chief of staff Wickham demanded that a memo on congressional notification be sent to Powell. “The chief wanted it in writing,” stated Army Lt. Gen. Arthur E. Brown, who delivered the memo to Powell on March 7, 1986.[\[143\]](#)

Five days later, Powell handed the memo to President Reagan’s National Security Adviser John Poindexter with the advice: “Handle it ... however you plan to do it,” Powell later testified. Poindexter’s plan for “timely notification” was to tell Congress on the last day of the Reagan presidency, January 20, 1989. Poindexter stuck the Pentagon memo into a White House safe, along with the secret “finding” on the Iran missile shipments.

Col. John William McDonald, who oversaw covert supply, added his voice to the Pentagon objections when he learned that key Army officials had no idea where the weapons were headed.

“One [concern] was inadvertent provision of supplies to the [Nicaraguan] Contras in violation of the Boland Amendment,” which prohibited military shipments to the Contras, McDonald testified. “The

second issue was inadvertent supply to countries that were on the terrorist list. ... There is a responsibility to judge the legality of the request.”[144]

When McDonald was asked by congressional investigators how he would have reacted if told the weapons were going to Iran, he responded, “I would have told General Thurman ... that I would believe that the action was illegal and that Iran was clearly identified as one of the nations on the terrorist list for whom we could not transfer weapons.”[145]

But when McDonald joined other Pentagon officers in appealing to Powell about the missile shipment’s destination, they again were told not to worry; Powell “reiterated [that it was] the responsibility of the recipient” agency, the CIA, to notify Congress, “and that the Army did not have the responsibility to do that.”

Then, in March 1986, Powell conveyed a second order, for 284 HAWK anti-aircraft missile parts and 500 HAWK missiles. This time, Powell’s order set off alarms not only over legal questions, but whether the safety of U.S. forces might be jeopardized. The HAWK order would force a drawdown of U.S. supplies to a dangerous level. Henry Gaffney, a senior supply official, warned Powell that “you’re going to have to start tearing it out of the Army’s hide.”[146]

But the Pentagon again followed Powell’s instructions. It stripped its shelves of 15 spare parts for HAWK missiles that were protecting U.S. forces in Europe and elsewhere in the world. “I can only trust that somebody who is a patriot ... and interested in the survival of this nation ... made the decision that the national policy objectives were worth the risk of a temporary drawdown of readiness,” said Lt. Gen. Peter G. Barbules.[147]

If there had been an air attack on U.S. forces in Europe during the drawdown, the HAWK missile defense batteries might not have had the necessary spare parts to counter an enemy attack.

In his handling of the Iran-Contra arms shipments, Colin Powell had again demonstrated that he would put his prodigious skills to work for his superiors, regardless of the legality of their actions or the overall harm that their actions might inflict on U.S. interests.

Ironically, after helping set in motion the Iranian arms shipments that left U.S. forces in Europe potentially vulnerable, Powell was dispatched to West Germany, where he was made commander of the V Corps in pursuit of another general’s star.

Colin Powell's European assignment would end sooner than he had expected. Despite his success in shielding the secrets of the Iranian arms shipments from much of the Pentagon's high command, the secret finally spilled out in November 1986 with a report in a Lebanese weekly, *Ash-Shiraa*. President Reagan initially denied the arms-for-hostage story, but after the Iranian government confirmed it, Reagan began insisting it was simply a diplomatic gesture designed "to send a signal that the United States was prepared to replace the animosity between [the U.S. and Iran] with a new relationship."

However, the scandal kept growing, especially when it turned out that White House aide Oliver North had diverted some profits from the Iranian arms sales to the Nicaraguan Contras, giving birth to the Iran-Contra scandal. Reagan fired North and his immediate superior, John Poindexter, on November 25, 1986. Reagan also appointed a three-member board under former Texas Sen. John Tower to investigate the scandal. It was in that emergency climate that Colin Powell was summoned back to Washington.

"We need you, Colin," pleaded Frank Carlucci, who had replaced Poindexter as national security adviser. "This is serious. Believe me, the presidency is at stake."

Powell was hesitant to heed Carlucci's call. "You know I had a role in this business," he told his old mentor. But Carlucci, a skilled bureaucrat himself, quickly walled Powell off from the expanding scandal. On December 9, 1986, the White House obtained from the FBI a statement that Powell was not a criminal suspect in the secret arms deals. Carlucci also sought assurances from key players that Powell would stay outside the scope of the investigation. The next day, Carlucci asked Defense Secretary Weinberger "to call Peter Wallison, WH Counsel – to tell them Colin had no connection with Iran arms sales – except to carry out President's order."

Weinberger wrote down Carlucci's message. According to Weinberger's notes, he then "called Peter Wallison – Told him Colin Powell had only minimum involvement on Iran." The statement wasn't exactly true. Powell had played a crucial role in skirting the Pentagon's internal controls over missile shipments to get the weapons out of Defense warehouses and into the CIA pipeline. But with the endorsement of

Weinberger, Carlucci was satisfied that his old friend, Powell, was safe from legal exposure.

On December 12, 1986, Reagan formally asked Powell to quit his post as commander of V Corps in West Germany and to become deputy national security adviser. Powell described Reagan as sounding as jovial and folksy as ever. "Yes, sir," Powell answered. "I'll do it." But Powell was not enthusiastic. According to his memoirs, *My American Journey*, Powell felt he "had no choice."

Powell thus re-entered the Iran-Contra Affair, which he had helped create by secretly arranging the missile shipments to Iran. Powell flew back to Washington and assumed his new duties on January 2, 1987. By that time, the White House was pressing ahead with a plan for containing the Iran-Contra scandal. The strategy evolved from a "plan of action" cobbled together by White House Chief of Staff Don Regan immediately before the Iran-Contra diversion was announced on November 25, 1986. Oliver North and his colleagues at the National Security Council were to bear the brunt of the scandal.

"Tough as it seems, blame must be put at NSC's door – rogue operation, going on without President's knowledge or sanction," Regan had written. "When suspicions arose he [Reagan] took charge, ordered investigation, had meeting with top advisers to get at facts, and find out who knew what. ... Anticipate charges of 'out of control,' 'President doesn't know what's going on,' 'Who's in charge?'"

Suggesting that President Reagan was deficient as a leader was not a pretty option, but it was the best the White House could do. The other option was to admit that Reagan had authorized much of the illegal activity, including the 1985 arms shipments to Iran through Israel, transfers that Weinberger had warned Reagan were illegal and could be an impeachable offense.

After returning to Washington, Powell took to his task with skill and energy. His personal credibility was instrumental in convincing Official Washington that matters were now under control. Just as Powell deftly manipulated the Pentagon system, he was equally effective in his skillful handling of the press and Congress.

By February 1987, the containment strategy was making progress. Tower's investigation was finishing a report that found no serious wrongdoing but criticized Reagan's management style. In its February 26 report, the Tower Board said the scandal had been a "failure of responsibility" and chastised Reagan for putting "the principal responsibility for policy review and implementation on the shoulders of his advisers."

On matters of fact, however, the board accepted Reagan's assurances that he knew nothing about Oliver North's secret efforts to funnel military supplies to the Nicaraguan Contras and that the President had no hand in the White House cover-up of the Iran-Contra secrets. "The Board found evidence that immediately following the public disclosure, the President wanted to avoid providing too much specificity or detail out of concern for the hostages still held in Lebanon and those Iranians who had supported the initiative," the Tower report stated. "In doing so, he did not, we believe, intend to mislead the American people or cover-up unlawful conduct."

To dampen the scandal further, Powell helped draft a limited *mea culpa* speech for Reagan to give on March 4, 1987. Powell felt that the Tower Board had been too tough on Secretary of State George Shultz and Powell's old boss, Caspar Weinberger. So Powell tried to insert some exculpatory language. "I tried to get the President to say something exonerating these two reluctant players," Powell wrote in his memoir.

Powell's suggested language noted that Shultz and Weinberger had "vigorously opposed" the Iranian arms sales and that they were excluded from some key meetings "by the same people and process used to deny me [Reagan] vital information about this whole matter." In the speech, Reagan finally acknowledged that the operation had involved "trading arms for hostages" and "was a mistake." But the President did not read the phrasing meant to exonerate Shultz, Weinberger and, by inference, Weinberger's assistant in 1985-1986, Colin Powell.

After Reagan's limited admission, the White House resumed its strategy of shifting the bulk of the blame onto Oliver North and other "cowboy" NSC staffers. Reagan, however, was not always cooperative with the plan. In one press exchange about North's secret Contra-supply operation, Reagan blurted out that it was "my idea to begin with."

Powell's personal credibility helped persuade key journalists to accept the White House explanations and excuses. Soon, Washington's

conventional wisdom had bought into the notion of Reagan's inattention to detail and North's rogue operation.

At *Newsweek*, I had found myself on the outside of this press consensus. I kept insisting that this new line of defense was just the latest cover-up in the scandal. But there were too many well-respected figures in Washington, including Colin Powell, whose words were considered golden. Powell's skillful protection of the Iran-Contra secrets would earn him the gratitude of Reagan-Bush insiders and lift Powell into the top echelons of the Republican Party. [\[++++\]](#)

Because of my research into Colin Powell's real narrative, I was much more skeptical than other Washington journalists when he appeared before the United Nations on February 5, 2003 to accuse Iraq of possessing weapons of mass destruction. Despite his commanding presence and his reputation for integrity, I knew him to be a man with no moral anchor, someone who would say whatever his superiors told him to say, a person who would break any rule or tell any lie if it would advance his career and his reputation.

So, at *Consortiumnews.com*, I responded to his widely praised speech with a counter-narrative, entitled "Trust Colin Powell?" On February 6, as *The Washington Post* and other mainstream U.S. publications were filled with gushing enthusiasm for Powell's presentation, my article began:

"The U.S. news media promoted two 'themes' about Secretary of State Colin Powell's trip to the United Nations where he buttressed George W. Bush's case for war with Iraq by presenting satellite photographs of trucks outside buildings and snippets of intercepted conversations. While the 'evidence' on its face didn't seem to prove much of anything, the media's first 'theme' was that Powell is a trustworthy man of principle, a straight talker who wouldn't be part of some cheap propaganda ploy.

"The second 'theme' was that Powell's appearance before the United Nations was a kind of sequel to Adlai Stevenson's convincing case that Soviet missiles had been installed in Cuba in 1962. But both themes – Powell's trustworthiness and the Cuban missile precedent – may be misleading. ... Powell's press clippings aside, his real history is one of consistent political opportunism."

More than two years later, after the Bush administration's hazy allegations of WMD in Iraq had turned out to be a mirage, Powell – after leaving the State Department – acknowledged that his false speech had been a “blot” on his record. He also claimed that he was a “reluctant warrior,” yet someone who still supported President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime.

“I am right there with him with the use of force,” Powell said in an interview.

By the time the U.S. military operation in Iraq ended, nearly 4,500 U.S. troops were dead and more than 32,000 were wounded. Estimates of Iraqi deaths ranged into the hundreds of thousands. Most independent analysts regarded the American-led invasion, which drained the U.S. Treasury of nearly \$1 trillion, to be a major geopolitical catastrophe and a gross violation of international law.

Chapter Eleven: ‘The Wise Man from Wichita’

Another undeserving “wise man” from the Reagan-Bush era was Robert Gates. Like Powell, he was a careerist who floated to the top levels of Washington power by loyally serving those above him even if his actions required him to skirt the law and hide the truth. Also, like Powell, Gates was accomplished at handling Washington’s perceptions and the press.

Gates’s cool use of power – and his conscience-less ability to mislead while presenting a boyish innocence – made him a formidable intelligence official and an accomplished government bureaucrat. But his actions often were antithetical to American principles and harmful to larger U.S. interests.

In his early years at the CIA, Gates was an ambitious Cold Warrior who was implicated in the October Surprise case of 1980, allegedly going behind the backs of his legal superiors – CIA Director Stansfield Turner and President Jimmy Carter – by joining with Ronald Reagan’s campaign director William Casey to help frustrate Carter’s efforts to free 52 American hostages in Iran. Gates was alleged to have joined Casey and then-Republican vice presidential nominee George H.W. Bush at a secret meeting in Paris to seal a hostage-delay deal with the Iranians.

After Reagan’s victory and after Casey was tapped to be CIA director, Gates leapfrogged over many more senior CIA officials into key positions of power at the spy agency, taking over the powerful analytical division – the Directorate of Intelligence or DI – and then rising to deputy director. However, Gates’s rapid ascent – and his readiness to bend CIA analyses to fit Casey’s right-wing opinions – annoyed many CIA officers, including some who had been Gates’s superiors before they suddenly became his subordinates.

So, when Casey got entangled with the Iran-Contra deceptions, Gates had his share of enemies who didn’t mind seeing the upstart taken down a few notches. After coming under suspicion of misleading Congress regarding the Iran-Contra Affair, Gates was initially denied his dream of succeeding Casey in 1987, placing him briefly on the outs of Washington power.

But Gates still had some very powerful angels. After George H.W. Bush took over the presidency in 1989, he saved Gates's career by bringing him into the White House as deputy national security adviser. Then, in 1991, as Bush faced new pressure from the October Surprise and Iran-Contra investigations, he appointed Gates to become CIA director. Bush took that chance in fall 1991 despite knowing that Gates would have to weather a tough confirmation fight. But Bush succeeded in installing his loyalist in a key position from which he could control the flow of information to investigators looking into the scandals.

The October Surprise and the Iran-Contra cases were ultimately contained in late 1992 and early 1993 – as Republicans and their media allies mounted a stout defense and Democrats buckled – but Gates still found himself distrusted and out of a job when the Clinton administration arrived in 1993.

The ambitious and aspiring Gates landed in the political wilderness, but remained under the protective umbrella of George H.W. Bush, who helped Gates land the job of dean at the George Bush School of Government at Texas A&M. From there, Gates rose to be president of Texas A&M, the site of Bush's presidential library.

Gates's affability, his influential allies and the amnesia of many in Washington paved the way for Gates's triumphant second act on the national stage. In 2006, he received an appointment to the Iraq Study Group, a blue-ribbon panel led by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Rep. Lee Hamilton. At the time, President George W. Bush appeared deeply mired in the bloody Iraq War and the study group was assigned to look for possible ways out of the quagmire.

However, before the panel could complete its work – and with Republicans facing the loss of Congress in 2006 – the second President Bush asked Gates to take over the Defense Department, replacing the controversial Donald Rumsfeld.

The opinion leaders of Washington immediately hailed Gates as a brilliant choice, a "realist" who was close to the President's father and who would presumably counsel the impetuous son on how to bring the Iraq War to an end. The doubts about Gates's dubious past disappeared into a bipartisan black hole. At his confirmation hearings, the Senate Armed Services Committee treated him like a returning hero. He was a savior whose savvy might save the day.

Gates faced no challenging questions about his history or even his precise views on the Iraq War. Nor did the mainstream press show much skepticism about the accuracy of the conventional wisdom that Gates would be the agent of reason who would bring the war to an end. But, as it turned out, the mainstream news media and the Democrats completely misread the significance of Gates's appointment to replace Rumsfeld.

In reality, it was Rumsfeld who was the more dovish figure; Gates the more hawkish one. Rumsfeld favored the recommendations of his senior commanders on the ground, Generals George Casey and John Abizaid, who wanted to continue reducing the U.S. military footprint in Iraq, despite the horrendous violence engulfing the country in 2006. The Casey-Abizaid approach was roughly in line with what the Baker-Hamilton commission would eventually recommend. Though perceived publicly as a reckless warmonger, Rumsfeld was essentially in the same camp with Casey and Abizaid.

In private meetings with Bush, Gates had signed on to an alternative plan which was being pushed by neoconservatives, to expand the U.S. footprint with a "surge" of some 30,000 additional U.S. troops, essentially to escalate the war in Iraq, not wind it down. Unwilling to face the humiliation of an Iraq War defeat on his watch, President Bush was ready to throw more American lives into the fire of war and kill a lot more Iraqis to make sure that any forced U.S. withdrawal would not happen until after he was out of office. Gates, the longtime Bush Family hired hand, was the perfect choice to provide cover for this decision to create a decent interval between Bush's departure and the looming American defeat.

Gates, along with Bush's new field commander, Gen. David Petraeus, would become the personifications of the new narrative about the Iraq War. That narrative would hold that Bush may have made serious mistakes invading Iraq in pursuit of nonexistent weapons of mass destruction and may have botched the occupation, but his courageous "surge" snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

This "surge" narrative would become widely accepted in Washington power circles but it was never really true. A variety of other military and diplomatic initiatives that had predated the "surge" – including the Casey-Abizaid plan to bribe Sunni tribesmen into switching sides; the brutal ethnic cleansing that had separated Shiites from Sunnis; and special operations attacks targeting al-Qaeda's leadership like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – had a

much bigger impact on eventually reducing violence in Iraq than the modest increase in U.S. forces.

However, in 2008, as the tide of Iraqi violence receded somewhat, the U.S. news media embraced the “successful surge” narrative and turned Gates and Petraeus into heroes. Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama initially offered a subtle and essentially accurate assessment of the “surge” as only one factor in reducing the violence, but he was so hectored by mainstream media interviewers, who demanded that he admit he was wrong in doubting the “surge,” that Obama surrendered in an interview with Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly. Obama hailed the “surge” as having “succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”

However, contrary to Washington’s conventional wisdom, the “surge” did not bring ultimate victory to the U.S. expedition in Iraq. The Iraqi government still forced American forces out of the country at the end of 2011, meaning that many of the nearly 1,000 U.S. troops who died during the “surge” essentially sacrificed their lives to buy time for Bush to exit Washington with his head held high – and to give the neocons a talking point for shifting blame for the failed Iraq War onto President Obama.

Nevertheless, after winning the election in 2008, Obama came under bipartisan pressure from Official Washington to retain the widely admired Robert Gates at the helm of the Defense Department (and to keep the adored Gen. Petraeus in command of U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan). Obama acceded to this sentiment, sensing an opportunity to demonstrate his desire “to reach across the aisle.”

But Obama also locked himself into a narrative on the Iraq War that would restrict his options in deciding how to deal with the Afghan War, which had floundered for years as President Bush diverted military resources to his war of choice in Iraq. Gates, Petraeus and other Bush holdovers in the military command structure would simply transfer their “successful surge” strategy from Iraq to Afghanistan, arguing that the commitment of tens of thousands of more troops and an ambitious counterinsurgency approach would achieve “success” in Afghanistan as it supposedly had in Iraq.

As Obama tried to weigh other alternatives, such as a concentration on counterterrorism strikes that would allow a smaller footprint in Afghanistan – along the lines of the Casey-Abizaid approach to Iraq – he would find himself frustrated by the Gates-Petraeus axis limiting his options, giving

him only a choice of how big a “surge” to authorize. Fatefully, Obama eventually acceded to the Gates-Petraeus formula, boosting troop levels in Afghanistan by another 30,000 and authorizing a costly counterinsurgency approach.

Gates’s long experience in national security – and his growing legend – also gave him great credibility with journalists and policymakers when he argued passionately for another favorite Washington narrative, that the United States must not repeat the mistake it made in 1989 when the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan and the United States supposedly lost interest almost immediately.

According to that storyline, the U.S. neglect allowed Afghanistan to descend into a bloody civil war and ultimately to come under the control of the radical Taliban, which, in turn, gave refuge to Osama bin Laden, who, in turn, used Afghanistan to launch the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington.

Gates presented that Afghan narrative to credulous journalists in late 2009 when he was near the apex of his influence as the Republican Defense Secretary who had overseen the Iraq War’s “successful surge,” was kept on by the new Democratic president, and had fashioned a new “surge” for Afghanistan.

Typical of the fawning press coverage, *Washington Post* columnist David Broder lauded Gates on December 4, 2009, for his forthrightness. Broder, then known as “the dean of the Washington press corps,” wrote that the Defense Secretary is “incapable of dissembling.”[\[148\]](#)

Yet, just days after Broder’s column, Gates offered reporters his history lesson on Afghanistan, one that Gates knew to be false. He declared “that we are not going to repeat the situation in 1989.” While that story of the 1989 abandonment of Afghanistan had become a powerful conventional wisdom in Washington – popularized by the movie “Charlie Wilson’s War” – it was substantially untrue, and Gates, as a former top CIA official, knew it to be a myth.

But few questioned Gates during his golden second act in Washington. Effusive praise followed him through the end of his term as Obama’s first Defense Secretary on July 1, 2011. After he retired from Washington a

second time, *Washington Post* columnist Al Kamen dubbed Gates “the Wise Man from Wichita,” his original hometown in Kansas.[\[149\]](#)

Yet, to understand the real Robert Gates, as with the real Colin Powell, you have to go back to the early days of his career and examine how he clambered up the ladder of power in Washington. Almost no Washington journalist had undertaken that task, in part, because it was difficult given that Gates had emerged from the secretive world of the CIA. And, even by CIA standards, Gates’s history was hard to penetrate because he was a participant in some of the most opaque controversies of the Reagan-Bush-41 era.

Was he, as alleged, a participant in the October Surprise chicanery in 1980? Did he parlay that involvement into a fast track within the CIA bureaucracy? At the bidding of CIA Director William Casey, was Gates put in charge of gutting the CIA’s tradition of objective analysis of intelligence? Did he play a central role in another secret initiative, to ship military supplies to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the early 1980s? Did he aid and abet cover-ups of the October Surprise and Iran-Contra investigations after he was installed as CIA director in 1991?

No satisfactory answers to these questions were ascertained by the few official investigations that touched on those issues. Gates had such powerful protectors that almost no one in Official Washington dared push aggressively into the wilderness of mirrors that surrounded the darkest secrets of the U.S. government and its most trusted intelligence operatives, that largely self-appointed elite whom legendary CIA officer Miles Copeland called “the CIA within the CIA.”

The absence of any consistently hard-hitting official investigations meant that only a few pieces of the truth about Gates had broken free. A few more shards of information could be collected from the accounts of witnesses who had come forward only to have their own stories hammered. But assembling a complete and reliable narrative from this partial mosaic was nearly impossible.

Thus, Official Washington could sit back and accept the pleasing narratives of Robert Gates and similarly well-respected officials doing right by the country. But false narratives – and false heroes – can prove especially dangerous when the United States heads into dangerous terrain behind a guide who cannot be trusted.

Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe claimed he met Gates in Israel in the 1970s when they were both relatively junior officials in their nations' intelligence services. Ben-Menashe said Gates even visited his family home in Tel Aviv where his mother made dinner for them. Gates, however, insisted that he didn't know Ben-Menashe.

So, in the early 1990s, when I met Ben-Menashe's mother who was visiting him while he was living briefly in Lexington, Kentucky, I sprang a question on her about whether she knew Robert Gates. Though frail and elderly, Mrs. Ben-Menashe responded without hesitation and with a sparkle of recognition in her eyes. "Oh, yes, Bobby Gates," she said, recalling that she had once made a meal for him, just as Ben-Menashe had told me.

Still, I had doubts about Ben-Menashe's story. On the surface, it didn't seem to make sense that Gates, known as a Soviet specialist, would have spent time in Israel meeting with field agents like Ben-Menashe. However, years later, I learned from some of Gates's early supervisors in the CIA's analytical division that Gates, though assigned to the Soviet section, specialized in how Soviet policies applied to the Middle East. He prided himself in being a top Middle East expert inside the CIA, they said.

Perhaps, I thought, Ben-Menashe's story was not as improbable as it had first appeared, but Ben-Menashe's claims about Gates were more problematic than simply a question of a few encounters in Israel in the 1970s. Ben-Menashe also said that in October 1980, he spotted Gates, along with Donald Gregg and Iran expert George Cave, as CIA officers who accompanied Ronald Reagan's campaign chief William Casey and Republican vice presidential nominee George H.W. Bush to a meeting with Iranian emissaries in Paris. Ben-Menashe said Gates later was dispatched to Miami to assist Ben-Menashe in the delivery of cash that was part of the payoff for the Iranian hostage deal, according to his memoir, *Profits of War*.

Ben-Menashe insisted, too, that he dealt with Gates again in the 1980s when Gates was overseeing a secret project for helping Iraq in its war with Iran. Though the Reagan administration's goal at that point apparently was to prevent Iran from gaining a decisive upper-hand, Ben-Menashe said the Israelis feared the prospect that their more immediate enemy, Iraq, might gain unconventional weapons that could be turned against Israel. Ben-

Menashe said he last saw Gates in April 1989 when they had a meeting in Paramus, New Jersey.

Gates, of course, denied all this, but he also made checking out the truth of Ben-Menashe's accounts difficult at every turn. In 1991, for instance, then-President George H.W. Bush put Gates in as head of the CIA, where his agency then frustrated the congressional investigation into the October Surprise issue. In 1992, the House October Surprise task force sought records on the whereabouts of Gregg and Gates from January 1, 1980, through January 31, 1981, including travel plans and leaves of absence. But Gates's CIA was unhelpful, finally drawing a complaint from chief counsel Lawrence Barcella, who wrote to the CIA on June 9, 1992, saying the agency had not been responsive to three requests for information. [\[150\]](#)

Beyond the CIA's foot-dragging on documents, the House task force came under intense political pressure from George H.W. Bush's White House and soon retreated from its investigative mandate. The task force swept incriminating evidence under the rug and simply rejected the October Surprise allegations, essentially siding with Gates against Ben-Menashe.

However, after that decision was made in December 1992, the Russian parliament responded to an information request from the House task force by sending a summary of Soviet-era intelligence files on the history of secret U.S. arms sales to Iran. According to this Russian Report, Gates joined then-vice presidential candidate George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan's campaign chief William Casey in a clandestine meeting with Iranian representatives in Paris in October 1980. But the Russian Report was never seriously vetted. As Barcella later explained to me, it was simply set aside without any effort to clarify exactly what the Soviet KGB knew and how it knew it.

But the failure to check out the facts in the Russian Report was not the only missed opportunity to ascertain the real history of the Reagan-Bush-41 era and to discover the true record of Robert Gates. Another chance was squandered in 1991 at Gates's confirmation to become CIA director. In that investigation, Sen. David Boren, D-Oklahoma, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, brushed aside Ben-Menashe and another witness, Iranian businessman Richard Babayan, who connected Gates to illicit schemes to ship military supplies to Saddam Hussein's government during the Iran-Iraq War.

In an interview with PBS “Frontline,” Boren promised to question Babayan, but Boren reneged when Gates issued a denial of the Iraqgate charges. Boren and his committee staff, headed by chief of staff George Tenet, also swatted away Ben-Menashe’s accounts of Gates as the point man for the CIA’s covert supplying of Iraq in the 1980s.

While the committee’s passing on Babayan’s offer of testimony was disappointing, the failure to assess in any serious way Ben-Menashe’s claimed relationship with Gates represented a much worse tragedy for history. If Ben-Menashe was telling the truth about knowing Gates, that would help solve a series of important mysteries. Conversely, if Ben-Menashe was lying about dealing with Gates, the Israeli’s credibility would suffer a devastating blow.

By mid-1991, my own journalistic efforts to challenge Ben-Menashe’s claims about Gates – and thus punch a major hole in the Israeli’s stories – had become a central feature in my periodic contacts with him. Yet, whenever I thought I had solid evidence to disprove one of Ben-Menashe’s substantive claims, the evidence would curiously melt away, such as George H.W. Bush’s alibi stories from October 1980.

But I thought I finally had Ben-Menashe tripped up when he insisted he had met with Gates in April 1989 during a trip to Paramus, New Jersey. I even pinned the time down, to the afternoon of April 20, 1989, because Ben-Menashe had been under Customs surveillance that morning. Since Gates denied knowing Ben-Menashe at all, it was a perfect test for determining which one was lying.

The Senate Intelligence Committee had yet to vote on Gates’s CIA confirmation, so I brought the information about the alleged New Jersey meeting to the attention of the committee’s staff. They checked with Gates about his whereabouts on April 20 and then called me back. The staffer on the phone was laughing. He said Gates had a perfect alibi for that day: he had been with Senator Boren at a speech in Oklahoma.

But when I cross-checked that claim, it turned out that Gates’s Oklahoma speech had been on April 19, a day earlier, and that Boren had not been present. I also discovered that Gates had returned to Washington by that evening. So where was Gates the next day? Could he have taken a quick trip to northern New Jersey? Since senior White House national security officials keep detailed daily calendars, it should have been easy for

Boren's investigators to check Gates's scheduled meetings and corroborate his alibi with a few interviews.

After I pointed out the first false alibi on the Oklahoma speech, the committee staffers agreed to check again. I got a call back saying that, yes, it was true that Gates had been in Oklahoma on April 19 and had returned to Washington. But the staff investigator told me that Gates's White House calendar showed no trip to New Jersey on April 20 and that Gates had denied taking such a trip. That was good enough for the committee, I was told.

But the investigators couldn't (or wouldn't) tell me where Gates was that afternoon or with whom. The committee also acknowledged that none of Gates's potential alibi witnesses had been interviewed. My later request to review their copy of Gates's calendar myself was rebuffed with the explanation that it apparently had been returned to Gates.

For his part, Gates wrote in his memoir, *From the Shadows*, that "the allegations of meetings with me around the world were easily disproved for the committee by my travel records, calendars, and countless witnesses." But none of Gates's supportive evidence was made public by Gates, by the Intelligence Committee, or by later inquiries into Iran-Contra, October Surprise and Iraqgate. Not one of Gates's "countless witnesses" who supposedly could vouch for his whereabouts was identified.

It wasn't until 2007 after Gates had become George W. Bush's Defense Secretary (replacing Donald Rumsfeld) that I finally secured a copy of Gates's calendars from the archivists at the Bush presidential library, via a Freedom of Information Act request. I quickly leafed through the FOIA packet and pulled out the April 20, 1989, page.

The calendar showed Gates with a full slate of White House meetings through the afternoon, including a public signing ceremony for the Space Council at 1:05 p.m., an Oval Office meeting with Belize's Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel at 3 p.m., and a session with two journalists John Cochran and Sandy Gilmore at 4 p.m.[\[151\]](#)

Looking at the entries for April 20, 1989, I thought I finally had the proof to confront Ben-Menashe with a clear-cut lie. It didn't seem likely that Ben-Menashe could slip away from such conclusive proof. However, before I challenged Ben-Menashe directly, I decided to check out the calendar as best I could.

Given the lapse of 18 years, it was likely that memories of Gates's routine meetings with White House staff might be especially hazy. Still, I could ask the archivists at the George H.W. Bush Library to check for photos of the public signing event. A picture of Gates would surely nail down that part of the time window. There also are sign-in sheets for Oval Office meetings like the one with the prime minister of Belize, so that would cover mid-afternoon. And the two reporters might recall a White House sit-down with Gates.

So, at my request, the archivists located both still photos and video footage of the Space Council event. The images covered pretty much the entire room, but to my surprise, Gates was nowhere to be seen. I then got the sign-in sheet for the Oval Office meeting that Gates had supposedly attended. Gates's name was missing.[\[152\]](#) When I tracked down the two reporters, neither had any recollection of the interview with Gates.

Later, I also obtained the Secret Service sign-in sheets showing everyone who visited the White House on April 20 and which White House official approved the visits. Though Gates had frequently cleared visitors in on other days, he was not listed as being visited by anyone on April 20, including the names on his calendar. In other words, there remained big holes in Gates's alibi for the time frame that Ben-Menashe had indicated for their meeting in northern New Jersey.

The flawed alibis for Gates also represented another indictment of the Senate Intelligence Committee under David Boren and his then-chief of staff George Tenet. In 1991, it would have been simple to check with Gates's alibi witnesses whose memories would have been much fresher and who could have easily checked their personal notes. Instead, Boren and Tenet essentially accepted Gates's word and the reliability of his calendar entries, which in several key instances appeared to be false.

At his confirmation hearings, Gates also faced extraordinary testimony from his CIA colleagues about his skills at "cooking" intelligence, baked to the precise recipes favored by those in the White House. Intelligence officers stepped out of the shadows and accused Gates of corrupting the CIA's analytical standards for providing honest assessments to U.S.

policymakers. The storyline they presented of Gates's career was one of blind and craven ambition.

According to these accounts, after Casey became CIA director in 1981, Gates shoved aside more senior (and more talented) officials and rose quickly to head the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence. In that key job – and later as Casey's deputy director – Gates shook up the DI, putting more pliable analysts on the fast track and sidetracking those who wouldn't go along with the new Reagan regime.

Most notably, Gates ingratiated himself with the administration's Cold War hardliners, including the emerging neoconservatives, by distorting CIA analyses to exaggerate the Soviet menace – and thus justify higher military spending and more aggressive strategies.

Instead of seeing the signs of a coming Soviet collapse, Gates's analytical product conjured up a Soviet empire gaining on all fronts and supporting international terrorism to boot. Ultimately, Gates's politicized CIA was so busy hyping Moscow's strength that it missed the Soviet collapse. Rather than detecting a badly wounded bear staggering through the forest bleeding profusely, desperately seeking refuge and accommodation, Gates's CIA transformed the Soviet Union into a rampaging grizzly, mauling American interests around the world and readying for a charge across America's southern border.

Reading the body language of his political masters, Gates exaggerated some threats – like Cuba and Nicaragua – while minimizing other risks. To fit with Reagan's geopolitical needs, Gates's CIA downplayed threats that have emerged as major dangers today. For instance, analysts who warned about Pakistan's secret work on a nuclear bomb were ignored and punished, apparently because the Reagan administration needed Pakistan's help in supporting anti-Soviet mujahedeen rebels in Afghanistan. As a result, not only did Pakistan get a destabilizing nuclear arsenal but the heavily armed jihadists in Afghanistan created the chaos that set the stage for the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks.

The former intelligence officers who testified against Gates described incident after incident in which Gates pressured the DI to hype the Soviet menace in line with the ideological view of the Reagan administration. Analysts who took a more nuanced view of Soviet power and behavior faced pressure and career reprisals.

In 1981, Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl of the CIA's Soviet office was the unfortunate analyst who was handed the assignment to prepare an analysis on the Soviet Union's alleged support and direction of international terrorism. Contrary to the desired White House take on Soviet-backed terrorism, Ekedahl said the consensus of the intelligence community was that the Soviets discouraged acts of terrorism by groups getting support from Moscow for practical, not moral, reasons.

"We agreed that the Soviets consistently stated, publicly and privately, that they considered international terrorist activities counterproductive and advised groups they supported not to use such tactics," Ekedahl told the Senate Intelligence Committee. "We had hard evidence to support this conclusion."

But Gates took the analysts to task, accusing them of trying to "stick our finger in the policy maker's eye," Ekedahl testified. Ekedahl said Gates, dissatisfied with the terrorism assessment, joined in rewriting the draft "to suggest greater Soviet support for terrorism and the text was altered by pulling up from the annex reports that overstated Soviet involvement."

In his memoir, *From the Shadows*, Gates denied politicizing the CIA's intelligence product, though acknowledging that he was aware of CIA Director Casey's hostile reaction to the analysts' disagreement with right-wing theories about Soviet-directed terrorism.

Soon, the hammer fell on the analysts who had prepared the Soviet-terrorism report. Ekedahl said many analysts were "replaced by people new to the subject who insisted on language emphasizing Soviet control of international terrorist activities." A donnybrook ensued inside the U.S. intelligence community. Some senior officials responsible for analysis pushed back against the Casey-Gates dictates, warning that acts of politicization would undermine the integrity of the process and risk policy disasters in the future.

Working with Gates, Casey also undertook a series of institutional changes that gave him fuller control of the analytical process. Casey required that drafts needed clearance from his office before they could go out to other intelligence agencies. Casey not only appointed Gates to be director of the DI, he also consolidated Gates's control over analysis by making him chairman of the National Intelligence Council, another key analytical body.

“Casey and Gates used various management tactics to get the line of intelligence they desired and to suppress unwanted intelligence,” Ekedahl said.

With Gates using top-down management techniques, CIA analysts sensitive to their career paths intuitively grasped that they could rarely go wrong by backing the “company line” and presenting the worst-case scenario about Soviet capabilities and intentions, Ekedahl and other CIA analysts said. The CIA’s proud Soviet analytical office thus underwent a purge of its most senior people.

“Nearly every senior analyst on Soviet foreign policy eventually left the Office of Soviet Analysis,” said Soviet specialist Melvin A. Goodman.

Despite the troubling allegations about Gates’s possible criminality in off-the-books operations and his corruption of the CIA’s analytical process, the powers-that-be closed ranks around him in 1991 and made sure his nomination to be CIA director was approved, although the 64-31 confirmation vote by the full Senate indicated an unusually high level of opposition.

In his 1996 memoir, Gates thanked his friend, David Boren, for pushing through his CIA nomination. “David took it as a personal challenge to get me confirmed,” Gates wrote.

Over the years more has emerged about the superficiality of Boren’s investigation of Gates. Four years later – in January 1995 – Howard Teicher, one of Ronald Reagan’s National Security Council officials, added more details about Gates’s role in the secret military shipments to Iraq, the same allegations from Ben-Menashe and Babayan that Boren had refused to pursue.

In a sworn affidavit submitted in a Florida criminal case, Teicher stated that the covert arming of Iraq dated back to spring 1982 when Iran had gained the upper hand in the war, leading President Reagan to authorize a U.S. tilt toward Saddam Hussein.[\[153\]](#)

The effort to arm the Iraqis was “spearheaded” by CIA Director William Casey and involved his deputy, Robert Gates, according to Teicher’s affidavit. “The CIA, including both CIA Director Casey and Deputy Director Gates, knew of, approved of, and assisted in the sale of

non-U.S. origin military weapons, ammunition and vehicles to Iraq,” Teicher wrote.

That same pro-Iraq initiative involved Donald Rumsfeld, then Reagan’s special emissary to the Middle East. An infamous photograph from 1983 showed a smiling Rumsfeld shaking hands with Saddam Hussein. But Teicher described Gates’s role as far more substantive than Rumsfeld’s.

“Under CIA Director Casey and Deputy Director Gates, the CIA authorized, approved and assisted [Chilean arms dealer Carlos] Cardoen in the manufacture and sale of cluster bombs and other munitions to Iraq,” Teicher wrote.

Teicher’s affidavit dovetailed with the earlier allegations from Ben-Menashe and Babayan, who also had fingered Cardoen as a key figure in the Iraqi arms pipeline. However, even in 1995, during the Clinton administration (when Teicher’s affidavit was submitted), the Iraqgate allegations were not seriously examined.

After Teicher provided the affidavit to a federal court in Miami, it was classified a state secret (though a copy reached the public before it could be sealed) and Teicher’s credibility was attacked. Prosecutors saw the affidavit as disruptive to their case against a private company, Teledyne Industries, and one of its salesmen, Ed Johnson, for selling explosives to Cardoen, who then fashioned them into cluster bombs for Iraq. (With Teicher’s affidavit kept from the jury, Johnson was convicted and sent to prison.)

In the Iran-Contra scandal, independent counsel Walsh chose not to indict Gates, though Walsh’s final report didn’t endorse Gates’s credibility either. After recounting discrepancies between Gates’s Iran-Contra recollections and those of other CIA officials, Walsh wrote:

“The statements of Gates often seemed scripted and less than candid. Nevertheless, given the complex nature of the activities and Gates’s apparent lack of direct participation, a jury could find the evidence left a reasonable doubt that Gates either obstructed official inquiries or that his two demonstrably incorrect statements were deliberate lies.”

For his part, Gates denied any wrongdoing in the Iran-Contra arms-for-hostage deal and expressed only one significant regret – that he acquiesced to the decision to withhold from Congress the January 17, 1986, presidential intelligence “finding” that gave some legal cover to the Iran arms shipments.

How Gates corrupted the CIA's analytical division came more into focus as more CIA veterans provided additional details about Gates and his bureaucratic techniques. For instance, Gates softened up the Directorate of Intelligence by demanding that the analysts more fully absorb the political and ideological culture of Washington.

In a speech to the DI's analysts and managers on January 7, 1982, Gates berated the division for producing shoddy analysis that administration officials didn't find helpful. Gates unveiled an 11-point management plan to whip the DI into shape. His plan included rotating division chiefs through one-year stints in policy agencies and requiring CIA analysts to "refresh their substantive knowledge and broaden their perspective" by taking courses at Washington-area think tanks and universities.

Gates declared that a new Production Evaluation Staff would aggressively review their analytical products and serve as his "junkyard dog." Gates's message was that the DI, which had long operated as an "ivory tower" for academically oriented analysts committed to objectivity, would take on more of a corporate culture with a product designed to fit the needs of higher-ups both inside and outside the CIA.

"It was a kind of chilling speech," recalled Peter Dickson, an analyst who concentrated on proliferation issues. "One of the things he wanted to do, he was going to shake up the DI. He was going to read every paper that came out. What that did was that everybody between the analyst and him had to get involved in the paper to a greater extent because their careers were going to be at stake."

A chief Casey-Gates tactic for exerting tighter control over the analysis was to express concern about "the editorial process," Dickson said. "You can jerk people around in the editorial process and hide behind your editorial mandate to intimidate people."

Gates soon was packing the analytical division with his allies, a group of managers who became known as the "Gates clones." Some of those who rose with Gates were David Cohen, David Carey, George Kolt, Jim Lynch, Winston Wiley, John Gannon and John McLaughlin.

Though Dickson's area of expertise – nuclear proliferation – was on the fringes of the Reagan administration's primary concerns, it ended up

getting him into trouble anyway. In 1983, he clashed with his superiors over his conclusion that the Soviet Union was more committed to controlling proliferation of nuclear weapons than the administration wanted to hear. When Dickson stood by his evidence, he soon found himself facing accusations about his fitness and other pressures that eventually caused him to leave the CIA.

Dickson also was among the analysts who raised alarms about Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons, another sore point because the Reagan administration wanted Pakistan's assistance in funneling weapons to Islamic fundamentalists fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. One of the effects from the exaggerated intelligence about the Soviet menace was to make other potential risks – such as allowing development of a nuclear bomb in the Islamic world or training Islamic fundamentalists in techniques of sabotage – pale in comparison.

While worst-case scenarios were *de rigueur* for the Soviet Union and its clients, best-case scenarios were the order of the day for Reagan's allies, including Saudi Osama bin Laden and other Arab extremists rushing to Afghanistan to wage a holy war against the Russians. As for the Pakistani drive to get a nuclear bomb, the Reagan administration turned to word games to avoid triggering anti-proliferation penalties that otherwise would be imposed on Pakistan.

“There was a distinction made to say that the possession of the device is not the same as developing it,” Dickson told me. “They got into the argument that they don't quite possess it yet because they haven't turned the last screw into the warhead.”

Finally, the intelligence on the Pakistan Bomb grew too strong to continue denying the reality. But the delay in confronting Pakistan ultimately allowed the military dictators in Islamabad to produce nuclear weapons. Pakistani scientists also shared their know-how with “rogue” states, such as North Korea and Libya.

Through the 1980s, Robert Gates put so many blinders on the CIA's analytical division that it missed the most important geopolitical development of the last half of the 20 Century, the collapse of the Soviet

Union, a failure that had calamitous consequences for future developments in Afghanistan as well.

In a 2008 book, *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA*, former senior CIA analyst Melvin Goodman expanded on how Gates contributed to that disaster as the chief action officer for the Reagan administration's drive to tailor intelligence reporting to White House political desires.

Though acknowledging that the ethos of tough-minded, "bark on" intelligence analysis had begun to erode in the 1970s – with President Richard Nixon's appointment of James Schlesinger as CIA director and Gerald Ford's choice of George H.W. Bush in 1976 – Goodman said the principle of objectivity was swept away in 1981 when Ronald Reagan put in his campaign chief, William Casey, as CIA director.

After Casey appointed Gates to run the analytical division, "Bob Gates turned that ['bark on'] approach on its head in the 1980s and tried hard to anticipate the views of policymakers in order to pander to their needs," Goodman wrote.

It didn't take long for the winds of politicization to blow through the halls of CIA headquarters at Langley, Virginia, according to Goodman.

"Bill Casey and Bob Gates guided the first institutionalized 'cooking of the books' at the CIA in the 1980s, with a particular emphasis on tailoring intelligence dealing with the Soviet Union, Central America, and Southwest Asia," Goodman wrote. "Casey's first NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] as CIA director, dealing with the Soviet Union and international terrorism, became an exercise in politicization. Casey and Gates pushed this line in order to justify more U.S. covert action in the Third World.

"In 1985, they ordered an intelligence assessment of a supposed Soviet plot against the Pope, hoping to produce a document that would undermine Secretary of State [George] Shultz's efforts to improve relations with Moscow. The CIA also produced an NIE in 1985 that was designed to produce an intelligence rationale for arms sales to Iran."

One of the key distortions pushed by Casey and Gates was the notion that the Soviet Union was a military behemoth with a robust economy – rather than a decaying power with a shriveling GDP. The logic of the Casey-Gates position was that exaggerating the Soviet menace not only justified higher U.S. military spending but also was a rationale for U.S.-supported brush-fire wars.

Since the mid-1970s, the CIA's analytical division had been noting cracks in the Soviet empire as well as signs of its economic-technological decline. But that analysis was unwelcome among Reagan's true-believers. So, in 1983 when CIA analysts sought to correct over-estimations of Soviet military spending – to 1 percent a year, down from 4 to 5 percent – Gates blocked the revision, according to Goodman.

From his front-row seat at CIA headquarters, Goodman watched in dismay as Gates used his bureaucratic skills to consolidate the agency's new role as cheerleader for favored White House policies.

“While serving as deputy director for intelligence from 1982 to 1986, Gates wrote the manual for manipulating and centralizing the intelligence process to get the desired intelligence product,” Goodman wrote. Gates promoted pliable CIA careerists to top positions, while analysts with an independent streak were pushed to the sidelines or out of the agency.

“In the mid-1980s, the three senior [Soviet division] office managers who actually anticipated the decline of the Soviet Union and Moscow's interest in closer relations with the United States were demoted,” Goodman wrote, noting that he was one of them. “The Reagan administration would not accept any sign of Soviet weakness or constraint, and CIA director Casey and deputy director Gates made sure intelligence analysis presented the Russian Bear as threatening and warlike.”

Years later, I was told by a senior CIA's operations official that some of the CIA's best spies inside the Soviet hierarchy supported the view that the Soviet Union was headed toward collapse, not surging toward world supremacy as Reagan and his foreign policy team insisted in the early 1980s.

Ray McGovern, another veteran of the CIA's Soviet branch who briefly supervised Gates early in his career, offered a similar assessment of Gates in 2006, calling him “the one most responsible for institutionalizing the politicization of intelligence analysis. He set the example and promoted malleable managers more interested in career advancement than the ethos of speaking truth to power.”

McGovern wrote at *Consortiumnews.com*: “Talk to anyone who was there at the time (except the sycophants Gates co-opted) and they will explain that Gates's meteoric career had mostly to do with his uncanny ability to see a Russian under every rock turned over by Casey. Those of

Gates's subordinates willing to see two Russians become branch chiefs; three won you a division. I exaggerate only a little.

“To Casey, the Communists could never change; and [Soviet President Mikhail] Gorbachev was simply cleverer than his predecessors. With his earlier training in our Soviet Foreign Policy branch (and a doctorate in Soviet affairs no less), Gates knew better. Yet he carried Casey's water, and stifled all dissent.

“One consequence was that the CIA as an institution missed the implosion of the Soviet Union – no small matter. Another was a complete loss of confidence in CIA analysis on the part of then-Secretary of State George Shultz and others who smelled the cooking. In July 1987 in the wake of the Iran-Contra Affair, Shultz told Congress: ‘I had come to have grave doubts about the objectivity and reliability of some of the intelligence I was getting.’”[\[154\]](#)

Robert Gates became a stalwart enforcer of the Reagan orthodoxy regarding the Soviet menace. So much so that Gates ended up in the camp of Cold War dead-enders who insisted that the *perestroika* of Soviet President Gorbachev in the late 1980s was just a ruse. That led Gates to dismiss Gorbachev's promises to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan despite contrary to assessments from the State Department's intelligence analysts.

The combination of Gates's miscalculation on Soviet intentions in Afghanistan and his general belligerence toward Moscow would have profound – and devastating – consequences for the future. Gates was instrumental in preventing U.S. and Soviet diplomats from working out a negotiated settlement of the Afghan civil war, one that might have involved a coalition government and precluded the eventual rise of the Pakistani-organized Taliban.

In the last year of the Reagan administration in 1988, the CIA – with Gates's new “corporate men” filling key analytical slots – was predicting that Gorbachev was not serious about withdrawing Soviet forces from Afghanistan but that if he did, the departure would be followed by a quick victory of the U.S.-supported mujahedeen over the communist government of Najibullah, the Soviet-backed president.

However, State Department analysts saw matters differently. They thought Gorbachev was a true reformer, believed he was committed to bringing home the battered Soviet army and saw the Najibullah government as a formidable foe. Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead and the department's intelligence chief Morton Abramowitz challenged the CIA's assumptions and warned that Najibullah's army might hold on longer than the CIA expected.

But CIA Deputy Director Gates pushed the CIA analysis of a rapid Najibullah collapse and prevailed in the policy debates. Gates described this internal battle in his 1996 memoir, *From the Shadows*, recalling how he briefed Secretary of State Shultz and his senior aides about the CIA's prediction prior to Shultz flying to Moscow in February 1988.

"I told them that most [CIA] analysts did not believe Najibullah's government could last without active Soviet military support," wrote Gates, who also was predicting privately that the Soviets would renege on Gorbachev's assurances of a withdrawal.

After the Soviets did withdraw in early 1989, some U.S. officials felt Washington's geostrategic aims had been achieved and a move toward peace was in order. There also was concern about the Afghan mujahedeen, especially their tendencies toward brutality, heroin trafficking and fundamentalist religious policies.

However, the new administration of George H.W. Bush – with Gates having moved from the CIA to the White House as deputy national security adviser – chose to continue U.S. covert support for the mujahedeen, funneled primarily through Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence, the ISI.

In 1989, I was a correspondent for *Newsweek* magazine covering intelligence issues. After the Soviets left Afghanistan, I asked CIA officials why they were continuing the bloodshed, instead of looking for ways of preventing further fragmentation of the country. Why not, I asked, bring the war to an end with some kind of power-sharing arrangement? Hadn't the U.S. national interest of driving out the Soviets been achieved?

One of the CIA hardliners responded to my question with disgust. "We want to see Najibullah strung up by a light pole," he snapped. What I thought I was hearing was CIA bravado, but the comment actually reflected an internal U.S. government debate, one that Gates and CIA hardliners won. President George H.W. Bush expanded the intelligence finding that

governed the Afghan covert operation, from Ronald Reagan's rationale of forcing out the Soviets to a vaguer goal of helping Afghanistan achieve self-determination.

Instead of the expected fast collapse, however, Najibullah's regime used its Soviet weapons and advisers to beat back a mujahedeen offensive in 1990. Najibullah hung on. The war, the violence and the disorder continued. Gates finally recognized that his CIA rapid-collapse analysis was wrong. In his memoir, he wrote: "As it turned out, Whitehead and Abramowitz were right" in their warning that Najibullah's regime might not collapse so quickly.

"Najibullah would remain in power for another three years [after the Soviet pull-out], as the United States and the USSR continued to aid their respective sides," Gates wrote. "On December 11, 1991, both Moscow and Washington cut off all assistance, and Najibullah's government fell four months later. He had outlasted both Gorbachev and the Soviet Union itself."

Gates had been wrong not only about the events in Afghanistan but about the future of the Soviet Union, supposedly his chief area of expertise. The Soviets were not the rising geopolitical threat that Gates had claimed as the Reagan administration's star analyst who made the CIA's proud DI bend to his prejudices.

The older Kremlinologists – and the U.S. spies in Moscow – had been right. The Soviet Union was a rusted shell of a superpower desperate for accommodation, not confrontation, with the West. But Gates had applied his bureaucratic skills to ensure that the CIA as an institution didn't notice what was happening. Any analyst who did recognize the Soviet reality found his or her career in jeopardy.

"As a result, the CIA missed the radical change that Mikhail Gorbachev represented to Soviet politics and Soviet-American relations, and missed the challenges to his rule and his ultimate demise in 1991," Goodman wrote in his memoir.

When the Soviet Union – the CIA's principal intelligence target – collapsed without any timely warning to the U.S. government, the CIA analytical division was derided for "missing" this historic moment. But the CIA didn't as much "miss" the Soviet collapse as it was blinded by Gates and other ideologues to the reality playing out in plain sight.

Not only did Gates's politicization of the CIA analysis mean that the U.S. government invested hundreds of billions of dollars in weapons system

designed to fight an enemy that was tottering toward collapse, but the failure of intelligence also had dire consequences in Afghanistan. Instead of accepting Gorbachev's olive branch in 1989 and seeking power-sharing among Afghanistan's warring parties, President George H.W. Bush embraced Gates's hard-line strategy and adopted a triumphalist approach to the complicated Afghan civil war.

Eventually, even Rep. Charlie Wilson, the hard-charging Texas Democrat who had used his chairmanship of a House Appropriations subcommittee to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid for the Afghan mujahedeen, began to realize that a negotiated settlement might make sense, especially as the brutality and corruption of the mujahedeen came into sharper focus after the Soviet departure.

According to George Crile's 2003 book, *Charlie Wilson's War*, Wilson kept the funding spigot open but started having second thoughts. Crile wrote: "Throughout the war, Wilson had always told his colleagues that Afghanistan was the one morally unambiguous cause that the United States had supported since World War II – and never once had any member of Congress stood up to protest or question the vast expenditures. But with the departure of the Soviets, the war was anything but morally unambiguous.

"By 1990, the Afghan freedom fighters had suddenly and frighteningly gone back to form, reemerging as nothing more than feuding warlords obsessed with settling generations-old scores. The difference was that they were now armed with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of weapons and explosives of every conceivable type. The justification for the huge CIA operation had been to halt Soviet aggression, not to take sides in a tribal war – certainly not to transform the killing capacity of those warriors."

Crile reported that Wilson traveled to Moscow and listened to appeals for a settlement of the long-running conflict from Andre Koserov, a future Russian foreign minister. Koserov told Wilson that Moscow and Washington had a common interest in preventing the emergence of radical Islamic control of Afghanistan. Upon returning to Washington, however, Wilson's openness to Moscow's overtures brought a stern rebuke from his friends in the CIA who wanted to see a clear-cut victory of the CIA-backed mujahedeen over the Soviet clients in Kabul.

“It was sad to see how quickly Wilson’s effort at statesmanship collapsed,” Crile wrote. “He found that it wasn’t easy to stop what he had started.” So, Wilson flipped back to the side of his old allies in the CIA and the Saudi royal family, which was matching the CIA’s huge contributions dollar for dollar.

“In the second year after the Soviet withdrawal, Wilson delivered another \$250 million for the CIA to keep its Afghan program intact,” Crile wrote. “With Saudi matching funds, the mujahedeen would receive another half billion dollars to wage war. The expectation was that they would join forces for a final push to throw out the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime, restore order, and begin the process of rebuilding.”

However, Najibullah’s forces continued to hold out and the mujahedeen broke down into internal bickering. They also showed their level of respect for human rights by slaughtering enemy prisoners. Eventually, the mujahedeen did capture the strategic city of Khost, but turned it into a ghost town as civilians fled or faced the mujahedeen’s fundamentalist fury. Western aid workers found themselves “following the liberators in a desperate attempt to persuade them not to murder and pillage,” Crile wrote.

U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley began to wonder who were the worse bad guys, the Soviet-backed communists or the U.S.-supported mujahedeen.

“It was the leaders of the Afghan puppet government who were saying all the right things, even paying lip service to democratic change,” Crile reported. “The mujahideen, on the other hand, were committing unspeakable atrocities and couldn’t even put aside their bickering and murderous thoughts long enough to capture Kabul.”

In 1991, as the Soviet Union careened toward its final crackup, George H.W. Bush’s administration had so many doubts about the nature of its erstwhile Afghan allies that it made no new request for money, and the Senate Intelligence Committee approved nothing for Afghanistan, Crile wrote. “But no one could just turn off Charlie Wilson’s war like that,” Crile noted. “For Charlie Wilson, there was something fundamentally wrong with his war ending then and there. He didn’t like the idea of the United States going out with a whimper.”

Wilson made an impassioned appeal to the House Intelligence Committee and carried the day. The committee first considered a \$100

million annual appropriation, but Wilson got them to boost it to \$200 million, which – with the Saudi matching funds – totaled \$400 million, Crile reported.

“And so, as the mujahideen were poised for their thirteenth year of war, instead of being cut off, it turned out to be a banner year,” Crile wrote. “They found themselves with not only a \$400 million budget but also with a cornucopia of new weaponry sources that opened up when the United States decided to send the Iraqi weapons captured during the Gulf War to the mujahideen.”

In perhaps the most authoritative book on the Afghan conflict, *Ghost Wars*, author Steve Coll wrote that “throughout 1989, the CIA pumped yet more arms, money, food, and humanitarian supplies into the Paktia border regions where the Arabs [Osama bin Laden’s group] were building up their strength.”

With the CIA determined to oust Najibullah from power, U.S. officials also continued to press Saudi Arabia to continue its massive investment in the Afghan conflict. Only gradually did Congress reduce the level of U.S. funding, though it remained substantial more than a year after the Soviets left.

“For the period from October 1989 through October 1990, Congress cut its secret allocation for the CIA’s covert Afghan program by about 60 percent, to \$280 million,” Coll wrote. “Saudi intelligence, meanwhile, provided \$435 million from the kingdom’s official treasury and another \$100 million from the private resources of various Saudi and Kuwaiti princes. Saudi and Kuwaiti funding continued to increase during the first seven months of 1990, bettering the CIA’s contribution.”

Yet, even with all that money and weaponry, the Afghan rebels needed an external event to prevail on the battlefield, the stunning disintegration of the Soviet Union in the latter half of 1991. Only then did Moscow cut off its aid to Najibullah. His government finally fell in 1992.

But its collapse didn’t stop the war – or the mujahedeen infighting. The capital of Kabul came under the control of a relatively moderate rebel force led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, an Islamist but not a fanatic. However, Massoud, a Tajik, was not favored by Pakistan’s ISI, which backed more extreme Pashtun elements of the mujahedeen.

Rival Afghan warlords battled with each other for another four years destroying much of Kabul. Finally, a disgusted Washington began to turn

away. Crile reported that the Cross Border Humanitarian Aid Program, which was the only sustained U.S. program aimed at rebuilding Afghanistan, was cut off at the end of 1993, almost five years after the Soviets left.

While chaos continued to reign across Afghanistan, the ISI readied its own army of Islamic extremists drawn from Pashtun refugee camps inside Pakistan. This group, known as the Taliban, entered Afghanistan with the promise of restoring order. The Taliban seized the capital of Kabul in September 1996, driving Massoud into a northward retreat.

The ousted communist leader Najibullah, who had stayed in Kabul, sought shelter in the United Nations compound, but was captured. The Taliban tortured, castrated and killed him, his mutilated body hung from a light pole – just as that hard-line CIA official had dreamed in 1989. The problem was that Najibullah's gruesome denouement occurred seven years later than expected – and by then, there was little the United States or anyone else could do to change the country's disastrous course.

The triumphant Taliban imposed harsh Islamic law on Afghanistan. Their rule was especially cruel to women who had made gains toward equal rights under the communists, but were forced by the Taliban to live under highly restrictive rules, to cover themselves when in public, and to forgo schooling.

The Taliban also granted refuge to Saudi exile Osama bin Laden, who had fought with the Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviets in the 1980s. Bin Laden then used Afghanistan as the base of operations for his terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, setting the stage for the next Afghan War in 2001.

In the early years of the 21 Century, it was fortuitous for Robert Gates that little was known or remembered about his misdeeds and miscalculations in the latter years of the 20 Century. Gates's skill in dodging investigative inquiries about his service for Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush in the 1980s also had shielded them from a much harsher historical judgment – and left a path open for Bush's eldest son, George W. Bush, to reach the White House via the unprecedented intervention of his father's friends on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Through the spring and summer of 2001, the inexperienced junior Bush rebuffed repeated warnings from CIA and counterterrorism analysts who were picking up signs that bin Laden had dispatched al-Qaeda operatives to the United States to carry out a major terrorist attack. Bush apparently was swayed by the advice of influential neoconservatives who had filled key positions at the Pentagon and inside the White House. They believed that the signs of a terrorist attack were simply disinformation meant to distract the new Bush administration from the more serious threat, from Iraq's Saddam Hussein.[\[155\]](#)

So, American defenses remained down on September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial airliners and crashed two into the Twin Towers in Lower Manhattan, another into the Pentagon, and the fourth into a field in Pennsylvania after passengers rebelled and fought for control of the plane, which was believed headed to the U.S. Capitol. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil in history.

After 9/11, the angry and frightened American people rallied behind their shaky young president, George W. Bush. The public wasn't much interested in a detailed examination of the various blunders that had led the United States to the devastating crisis. It was good enough that Bush was striking back at al-Qaeda and its Taliban protectors.

Instead of an accurate account of what led up to 9/11, misleading narratives were inserted, either blaming President Bill Clinton for failing to kill Osama bin Laden in the 1990s or asserting that the real mistake in U.S. policy was that Washington lost interest in Afghanistan as soon as the Soviets left in 1989.

Ironically, it was a 2007 movie entitled "Charlie Wilson's War," loosely based on Crile's book, that cemented the latter false narrative. The movie invented scenes in which Rep. Wilson, played by actor Tom Hanks, begged congressional colleagues for funding to rebuild Afghanistan, only to have his pleas ignored. The reality, as Crile's book, makes clear was quite different. The U.S. government continued covert support to the mujahedeen for several years after the Soviets left – and the principal obstacle to rebuilding the country was the continued feuding among the blood-thirsty rebel warlords who were the beneficiaries of the American/Saudi largesse.

The brightest hope for Afghanistan after the Soviets departed would have been a peace settlement leading to a coalition government, which

could have retained the bureaucratic structure of the old communist regime and merged it with more moderate elements of the Islamist rebels. That way the destructive chaos might have been brought to an end, some semblance of democracy might have been established, and the extremist Taliban might never have emerged from Pakistan to seize control of Kabul and to give safehaven to bin Laden and al-Qaeda .

The key U.S. official who had torpedoed that possibility of a more peaceful alternative history for Afghanistan was Robert Gates. Often collaborating with hard-line neocons, Gates had exploited his high-level national security positions at CIA and the White House to make sure no compromise settlement was possible.

So, by the time, George H.W. Bush's presidency ended in 1993 and Gates was ushered out of his job as CIA director, Gorbachev was long gone, Afghanistan was engulfed in chaos, and Pakistan was turning to another option, organizing young Afghans in refugee camps into the Taliban. The opportunity for saving Afghanistan had passed.

Another part of Gates's troubling legacy was the failure of the CIA's analytical division to withstand the intense political pressure that followed the 9/11 attacks when President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and the neocons were determined to attack Iraq and wanted to use claims about weapons of mass destruction as the justification. The DI, which Gates had rebuilt to be responsive to demands from above, no longer had the institutional backbone to stare down the politicians and the ideologues.

At that war-or-peace moment, the CIA was headed by George Tenet, the pliable congressional staffer who had helped Sen. David Boren suppress evidence of Gates's wrongdoing and thus clear the way for Gates's confirmation as CIA director in 1991. The back-slapping, go-along-to-get-along Tenet bent what was left of the DI's integrity to the needs of his political masters in the White House. He ended up sitting behind Secretary of State Colin Powell at the United Nations on February 5, 2003, when Powell delivered his deceptive speech about Iraq's WMD. Tenet's appearance was meant to embody the CIA's analytical endorsement of Powell's falsehoods.

In late 2006, when President George W. Bush selected Gates to be the new Defense Secretary, few in Washington knew – or wanted to remember – Gates’s real past. Instead, he was warmly welcomed back as an experienced national security veteran, a steady old hand who could guide a shaky young president.

Gates also stressed his bipartisanship. Though a Republican, he was never shy about noting that he had worked for two Democratic presidents, Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter. Few people were impolite enough to mention the evidence that he may have played a role in subverting the second of those Democratic presidents.

Instead of facing renewed skepticism or tough questions, Gates was embraced by the Washington press corps and many Democrats, who assumed that Rumsfeld’s ouster represented a reassertion of power by the more pragmatic advisers who had surrounded Bush’s father. *Newsweek* enshrined that conventional wisdom in a cover showing Poppy stepping into the foreground and Sonny slinking to the rear.

A few of us did try to ring the alarm bells. After Bush’s nomination of Gates, I wrote a long article at *Consortiumnews.com*, “The Secret World of Robert Gates,” describing Gates’s mysterious past and suggesting that the Senate take a hard look at his history before confirming him to a position that carried extraordinary weight amid wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – and that held substantial sway over how draconian rules in the “war on terror” might be interpreted.[\[156\]](#)

Ray McGovern, one of Gates’s former superiors during his early years at the CIA, penned an open letter to Sen. Carl Levin, D-Michigan, who was slated to become the Armed Services Committee chairman in the incoming Congress. McGovern urged Levin to take his time, demand a serious investigation of Gates, and not simply acquiesce to his appointment during the lame-duck session with the Republicans still in control.[\[157\]](#)

Observing how Levin was “unceremoniously diddled by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputies Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, chief architects of the fiasco in Iraq,” McGovern noted that “in two short months, you will chair Armed Services and will no longer have to tolerate such behavior. Indeed, you can start practicing now by not letting the nomination of Robert Gates be a ‘slam dunk.’”

However, Levin and the other Democrats were in no mood for a fight. Much like in late 1992 when they also had just won the November

elections, they were in a generous mood, looking forward to an era of greater bipartisanship. They also were bedazzled by the conventional wisdom that Bush's appointment of Gates meant that the petulant young President was finally being brought to heel by the "realists" who had worked for his dad.

The Democrats were not even jolted from their complacency when President Bush delivered a back-of-the-hand to the Baker-Hamilton commission's Iraq War troop drawdown plan, nor when *The New York Times* reported that Rumsfeld was fired after he had indicated a readiness to bring the war to an end.

In Amman, Jordan, on November 30, 2006, Bush said he had no interest in the gradual troop withdrawals that the bipartisan Baker-Hamilton commission was urging. Bush said American forces would "stay in Iraq to get the job done," adding "this business about graceful exit just simply has no realism to it whatsoever." Bush could have finessed the issue by saying he needed time to examine the panel's still-unpublished recommendations. Instead, he seemed to take pleasure in throwing them under the bus while also tossing in that mocking reference to the word, "realism."

Then, on December 3, the *Times* disclosed that Rumsfeld had written a memo on November 6 – a day before the congressional elections and two days before his forced resignation – calling for a "major adjustment" in Iraq War policy.

"Clearly what U.S. forces are currently doing in Iraq is not working well enough or fast enough," Rumsfeld wrote. The options that Rumsfeld wanted to consider included "an accelerated drawdown of U.S. bases from 55 now to 10 to 15 by April 2007 and to five by July 2007. Another idea was to commit U.S. forces only to provinces and cities that request the assistance. "Unless they [the local Iraqi governments] cooperate fully, U.S. forces would leave their province," Rumsfeld wrote.

Proposing a plan similar to one enunciated by Democratic Rep. John Murtha, an Iraq War critic, Rumsfeld suggested that the generals "withdraw U.S. forces from vulnerable positions – cities, patrolling, etc. – and move U.S. forces to a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) status, operating from within Iraq and Kuwait, to be available when Iraqi security forces need assistance."

And in what could be read as an implicit criticism of Bush's lofty rhetoric about transforming Iraq and the Middle East, Rumsfeld said the

administration should “recast the U.S. military mission and the U.S. goals (how we talk about them) – go minimalist.”[\[158\]](#)

Though it appears Bush’s recruitment of Gates was already underway when Rumsfeld issued his memo, Bush surely was aware of Rumsfeld’s revised thinking when he offered the job to Gates. The memo suggested that Rumsfeld might be going “wobbly” on the war, while Gates – a loyal “yes man” for the Bush Family – could be counted on to support whatever Bush wanted.

Another indication that Washington conventional wisdom about the significance of Gates’s appointment was wrong appeared in an article by right-wing pundit Fred Barnes in the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*. Barnes reported that the younger George Bush didn’t consult either his father or the elder Bush’s advisers about appointing Gates. The younger Bush only picked the ex-CIA chief after a two-hour face-to-face meeting at which Bush assured himself that Gates was onboard the neoconservative notion about “democracy promotion” in the Middle East.

“Two days before the election, the President summoned Gates to his ranch near Waco, Texas,” Barnes wrote. “It was the first time they’d talked about the Pentagon position. ... It was only the two of them. No aides participated in the meeting.

“The President wanted ‘clarity’ on Gates’s views, especially on Iraq and the pursuit of democracy. He asked if Gates shared the goal of victory in Iraq and would be determined to pursue it aggressively as defense chief. He asked if Gates agreed democracy should be the aim of American foreign policy and not merely the stability of pro-American regimes, notably in the Middle East. Bush also wanted to know Gates’s ‘philosophy’ of America’s role in the world, an aide says, and his take on the pitfalls America faces. ‘The President got good vibes,’ according to the Bush official.”[\[159\]](#)

Despite the flashing lights signaling that Gates’s appointment meant something other than a prompt end to the Iraq War, Democrats treated Gates like a beloved prophet emerging from a long sojourn in the wilderness. There would be no digging into the historical mysteries implicating Gates, nor into his role politicizing the CIA’s analytical division, a troubling legacy that contributed – through Gates’s “clones” who remained at the agency – to the bogus intelligence on Iraq’s alleged WMD. In the Gates way, that intelligence was delivered to President Bush just the way he wanted it.

Democrats didn't even bother to nail down the nominee's precise thinking on the Iraq War. Among many gaps in the questioning, the Democrats didn't press Gates on whether he shared the neoconservative vision of violently remaking the Middle East, whether he endorsed the Military Commissions Act's elimination of *habeas corpus* rights to fair trials, whether he supported warrantless eavesdropping by the Pentagon's National Security Agency, whether he agreed with Bush's claim of "plenary" – or unlimited – powers as a Commander in Chief who can override laws and the U.S. Constitution.

When Gates did stake out substantive positions, he almost invariably lined up with Bush's "stay-until-victory" plan in Iraq. Though insisting that "all the options are on the table," Gates rejected any timetable for military withdrawal as some Democrats had recommended. He also echoed Bush's argument that an American pullout would lead to a regional cataclysm. Instead, Gates advocated an open-ended U.S. military presence in Iraq.

"We are still going to have to have some level of American support there for the Iraqi military and that could take quite some time," Gates said.

Much of the news media's attention at the hearing focused on Gates's concession that the United States wasn't "winning" the war in Iraq. Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York and other Democrats praised Gates's "candor" on the topic, but that admission was made only in the context of Gates agreeing with assessments from Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Republican committee chairman, Sen. John Warner of Virginia.

When Gates offered some more bromides about his "fresh eyes" and his determination not to be "a bump on a log," the Democratic senators applauded again and joined with their Republican counterparts in endorsing Gates's nomination on a 21-0 vote. His nomination was approved by the full Senate, 95-2.

Within a few weeks, it became clear that Bush – with Gates's help – had bamboozled the Democrats. At his swearing-in ceremony on December 18, Gates endorsed Bush's contention that a U.S. military withdrawal without victory in Iraq and Afghanistan was unacceptable.

"All of us want to find a way to bring America's sons and daughters home again," Gates said. "But, as the President has made clear, we simply cannot afford to fail in the Middle East. Failure in Iraq at this juncture

would be a calamity that would haunt our nation, impair our credibility, and endanger Americans for decades to come.”

Gates also made clear that U.S. forces would remain indefinitely in Afghanistan despite the eroding military position of the U.S.-backed government there. “The progress made by the Afghan people over the past five years is at risk,” Gates said. “The United States and its NATO allies have made a commitment to the Afghan people, and we intend to keep it. Afghanistan cannot be allowed to become a sanctuary for extremists again.”

Gates rejected the notion that the U.S. military intervention in either country would wind down as long as Bush was President. “How we face these and other challenges in the region over the next two years will determine whether Iraq, Afghanistan and other nations at a crossroads will pursue paths of gradual progress towards sustainable governments, which are allies in the global war on terrorism, or whether the forces of extremism and chaos will become ascendant,” Gates said.

In his speech, Gates also went out of his way to echo Bush’s call for a more aggressive U.S. military that can intervene quickly around the world. “I was impressed by how deployable our military has become since I last served in government” as CIA director in 1991-1993, Gates said. “The President said that one of his top priorities was to help our military become more agile, more lethal and more expeditionary. Much has been accomplished in this; much remains to be done. This remains a necessity and a priority.”

Not only did Bush dash the Democrats’ hopes for a bipartisan strategy on Iraq by junking the Iraq Study Group recommendations, but he chose to escalate by adding 30,000 new troops. Instead of negotiating with Iran and Syria as the Iraq Study Group wanted, Bush sent aircraft carrier strike groups to the region. Rather than winding down the war, Gates helped Bush escalate it.

The two generals in charge of the Iraq War, George Casey and John Abizaid, were recalled, and the counterinsurgency expert, Gen. David Petraeus, was put in charge as head of Central Command. Gates also joined in pummeling the Democrats by suggesting that their legislation opposing the “surge” was aiding and abetting the enemy.

“Any indication of flagging will in the United States gives encouragement to those folks,” Gates told reporters at the Pentagon on

January 26, 2007. “I’m sure that that’s not the intent behind the resolutions, but I think it may be the effect.”

The “surge” would mark one of the bloodiest periods of the Iraq War. Nearly 1,000 of the almost 4,500 American fatalities would be recorded during this escalation, which also inflicted horrendous violence on the Iraqis.

One of those scenes was captured in the gun-barrel video of an airstrike on July 12, 2007, against a group of men, mostly unarmed, walking down a Baghdad street. An American helicopter crew then fired on a van, driven by a father with two children as passengers, that stopped to help some of the wounded. Among the dozen Iraqis killed were two *Reuters* newsmen and the father; the two children were wounded. The video of the incident, including audio of tasteless joking by the helicopter crew, drew international attention when it was released by *WikiLeaks* under the title “Collateral Murder.”

Despite Iraq’s grim death toll through much of 2007, the violence began to decline, leading to a new conventional wisdom in Washington, the “successful surge.” This consensus buoyed not only President Bush but the neocons who had advocated the escalation and the officials who carried it out, including Gen. Petraeus and Defense Secretary Gates.

Typically, it didn’t seem to matter to Washington’s elite that many military experts considered the “surge” only a minor factor in the decline in Iraqi violence, a drop-off that ticked down from catastrophic to merely horrendous levels.

A more serious analysis of what happened in Iraq in 2007-2008 would trace the decline in Iraqi sectarian violence mostly to strategies that predated the “surge” and were implemented by the commanding generals in 2006, George Casey and John Abizaid, who wanted as small a U.S. “footprint” as possible, to tamp down Iraqi nationalism.

Among their other 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.

The U.S. military also had 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 finally got – a firm timetable for American withdrawal from Bush.

Even author Bob Woodward, who had published best-sellers that fawned over 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 – and where no one wanted to be viewed as not giving credit to “the troops” – the myth grew that Bush’s “surge” had brought the violence under control. There was “victory at last,” as *Newsweek* declared, prematurely as it turned out.

This point about whether the Iraq “surge” should be viewed historically as a failure or a success was not simply an academic matter, nor was it just a human tragedy for all the young lives destroyed and the families devastated. The “surge” myth continued to shape policy.

It was Official Washington’s certitude about the “successful surge” in Iraq that encouraged Barack Obama, after his election in November 2008, to jettison his promises of “change” in war policies in favor of “continuity”

with the Bush administration, particularly through the retention of Bush's military high command.

A few of us did raise an alarm again about the prospect that Obama would keep Gates. On November 13, 2008, nine days after the election, I wrote at *Consortiumnews.com*, that "press reports say Barack Obama may retain George W. Bush's Defense Secretary Robert Gates as a gesture to war-time continuity, bipartisanship and respect for the Washington insider community, which has embraced Gates as something of a new Wise Man.

"However, if Obama does keep Gates on, the new President will be employing someone who embodies many of the worst elements of U.S. national security policy over the past three decades, including responsibility for what Obama himself has fingered as a chief concern, 'politicized intelligence.'"

But Obama did retain Gates as well as the rest of Bush's top military brass, allowing them to frame the debate in 2009 about the struggling Afghan War. Not surprisingly, they advocated a "surge" in Afghanistan, roughly the same size as the "successful surge" in Iraq, with a new commitment to counterinsurgency. Bob Woodward's book, *Obama's Wars*, described how Bush's old team made sure Obama was given no option other than to escalate troop levels in Afghanistan. The Bush holdovers also lobbied for the troop increase behind Obama's back.

According to Woodward's book, Gates, Petraeus and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Adm. Mike Mullen, refused to even prepare an early-exit option that Obama had requested. Instead, they offered up only plans for their desired escalation of about 40,000 troops. Woodward wrote:

"For two exhausting months, [Obama] had been asking military advisers to give him a range of options for the war in Afghanistan. Instead, he felt that they were steering him toward one outcome and thwarting his search for an exit plan. "He would later tell his White House aides that military leaders were 'really cooking this thing in the direction they wanted.'"

Woodward identified Gates, Petraeus and Mullen as "unrelenting advocates for 40,000 more troops and an expanded mission that seemed to have no clear end." The effort to box Obama in reached a crisis point on November 11, 2009, in the White House Situation Room when Obama confronted the three and complained, "You have given me one option [for

the escalation]. We were going to meet here today to talk about three options. ... You agreed to go back and work those up.”

Mullen protested. “I think what we've tried to do here is present a range of options.” But Obama shot back that two options were clearly unfeasible and the other two were variations of the 40,000-troop increase request. The Bush holdovers even resisted passing along a “hybrid” plan that came from outside their group, from Vice President Joe Biden who had worked with JCS vice chairman, Gen. James Cartwright. The plan envisioned a 20,000 troop increase and a more limited mission of hunting Taliban insurgents and training Afghan government forces.

Woodward reported, “When Mullen learned of the hybrid option, he didn't want to take it to Obama. ‘We're not providing that,’ he told Cartwright, a Marine known around the White House as Obama's favorite general. Cartwright objected. ‘I'm just not in the business of withholding options,’ he told Mullen. ‘I have an oath, and when asked for advice I'm going to provide it.’”

Later, Obama told Gates and Mullen to present the hybrid option as one possibility, but instead the Bush holdovers sabotaged the idea by organizing a classified war game, code-named Poignant Vision, that some military insiders felt was rigged to discredit the hybrid option, Woodward reported. According to Woodward's book, Petraeus cited the results of the war game to Obama at the November 11 meeting as proof the hybrid option would fail, prompting a plaintive question from a disappointed President, “so, 20,000 is not really a viable option?”

Without telling Obama about the limits of the war game, Mullen, Petraeus, Gates and then-field commander, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, asserted that the hybrid option would lead to mission failure. “Okay,” Obama said, “if you tell me that we can't do that, and you war-gamed it, I'll accept that,” according to Woodward's book.

Obama turned to Gates at one point with the complaint: “You have essentially given me one option,” the President said. “It's unacceptable.” Gates replied, “Well, Mr. President, I think we owe you” another option. But Woodward wrote, “It never came.”

Faced with this resistance from the Bush holdovers – and unaware that their war game may have been fixed – Obama finally devised his own option that gave Gates, Petraeus and Mullen most of what they wanted, 30,000 additional troops on top of the 21,000 that Obama had dispatched

shortly after taking office. Obama did try to bind the Pentagon to a more limited commitment to Afghanistan, including setting a date of July 2011 for the beginning of a U.S. drawdown.

Before Obama's decision to dispatch the 30,000 troops, the Bush holdovers also sought to hem in the President's choices by working with allies in the Washington news media and in think tanks, including by sponsoring propaganda visits to the war zone by influential neoconservatives.

For instance, early in 2009, Gen. Petraeus personally arranged for prominent neocons Max Boot, Frederick Kagan and Kimberly Kagan to get extraordinary access during a trip to Afghanistan.

"Fears of impending disaster are hard to sustain, however, if you actually spend some time in Afghanistan, as we did recently at the invitation of General David Petraeus, chief of U.S. Central Command," they wrote upon their return. "Using helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and bone-jarring armored vehicles, we spent eight days traveling from the snow-capped peaks of Kunar province near the border with Pakistan in the east to the wind-blown deserts of Farah province in the west near the border with Iran. Along the way we talked with countless coalition soldiers, ranging from privates to a four-star general," the trio said.

Their access paid dividends for Petraeus when they penned a glowing report in the *Weekly Standard* about the prospects for success in Afghanistan – if only President Obama sent more troops and committed the United States to stay in the war for the long haul.

However, the incoming Obama administration was warned of this possibility of backstabbing by Gates and other Bush appointees when it was lining up personnel for national security jobs in late 2008. Instead, Obama's team listened to Establishment Democrats like former Rep. Lee Hamilton and former Sen. David Boren, who were big fans of Gates.

American soldiers and many innocents in Afghanistan paid the highest price for the Gates-Petraeus counterinsurgency strategies, which sharply increased the bloodshed on all sides. During the seven-plus years of the Afghan War under President George W. Bush about 630 U.S. soldiers died in the conflict. During four years under President Obama, including the period of the "surge," about 1,500 have died.

Though Obama can cite successes in his Afghan-based counterterrorism strikes, including the killing of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011, the overall prospects of long-term success for the 11-year U.S. military mission called “Operation Enduring Freedom” remained dim.

Even as Robert Gates was finally heading for the Pentagon exits in 2011, he couldn’t resist displaying his bureaucratic skills to punish one last public servant who had refused to march in lockstep behind his prescribed path. Gates was determined to destroy the career of Marine Gen. James Cartwright who had broken ranks with his Pentagon superiors by giving President Obama’s alternative options to the Afghan “surge” in 2009. Cartwright was in line to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but Gates would see none of that.

The Washington Post’s Craig Whitlock reported that Cartwright’s expected elevation from JCS deputy chairman to JCS chairman was nixed, in part, by Gates who “had long mistrusted Cartwright because of his independent relationship with the president and for opposing [Gates’s] plan to expand the war in Afghanistan.”

Surrendering to Gates’s animosity toward Cartwright – and the expectation that Gates’s resistance would spark a nasty confirmation fight against Cartwright in the Senate – Obama instead scrambled to find another candidate and named Army Chief of Staff Martin Dempsey to the job. Obama took the opportunity of Dempsey’s appointment to again praise Gates as “our outstanding Secretary of Defense.” But Obama must have been wondering about his decision to keep Gates on in 2009, which always represented a kind of deal with the devil.

By retaining Gates at the Pentagon, Obama benefited from an image of bipartisanship on national security and from Gates’s credibility with Washington insiders. But the President had to acquiesce to substantial continuity with Bush’s policies and he found himself boxed in on the Afghan “surge.” The sacrifice of Cartwright – the one senior military commander who complied with Obama’s request for other options on Afghanistan – was just the latest price that Obama paid in his Faustian

bargain of keeping Secretary Gates and benefiting from his establishment credentials.

As Gates prepared to retire as Defense Secretary in late June 2011, he continued to be showered with rose petals of official praise, especially for his renowned “candor.” At one hearing before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, asked him about future U.S. relations with Pakistan and other “governments that lie to us.”

Gates responded, in his flat Kansas twang, that “most governments lie to each other. That’s the way business gets done.”

Gates’s *Realpolitik* answer drew appreciative laughter from the audience and the usual press kudos for his “refreshing candor,” but Gates’s response also could have been a reminder about his own dubious honesty regarding his role in major government scandals.

After all, if “most governments lie to each other,” it follows that government officials do the lying and the U.S. government is not immune from the practice. So, if Gates felt that his work for Republican presidents – while he was at the CIA and the White House – required some protective lying, would he lie?

At the Senate Appropriations Committee hearing, which was billed as his last congressional appearance as Defense Secretary, Gates was depicted in the media as a straight talker who had simply run out of patience with America’s deceptive allies and the endless political posturing of Washington.

The New York Times reported that the “hearing ... was in fact mostly a lovefest as members of the committee lavished praise on Mr. Gates. On June 30 he is to walk out of the Pentagon and into a life of writing books lakeside near Seattle.

“‘Secretary Gates, I look forward to you coming home to our home state,’ Senator Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington, said at one point in the hearing. ‘I know you must be looking forward to that.’

“‘Fifteen days,’ Mr. Gates replied, to laughter.”[\[160\]](#)

Yet, it was not likely that Gates would use his book writing to tell the full truth – and nothing but the truth – about what he had done as a government official. After all, as Gates made clear, lying is “the way business gets done.”

Conclusion

As I wrote in the Introduction, my goal with this book was not to address all the false narratives that have insinuated themselves into American history. Such a book would be very long and there are many other journalists and historians better qualified than me to address other parts of the historical record. Instead, I have focused on what I consider to be several pivotal cases that resonate today, such as the misrepresentation of the Framers as anti-government ideologues and the falsification of key narratives that occurred on my watch as a Washington-based journalist.

Mostly, I have dealt with parts of the history about which I have personally investigated, such as the turning-point elections of 1968 and 1980; the Iran-Contra Affair and related scandals; and the role of key individuals, such as Colin Powell and Robert Gates. As harsh as it may seem – especially as it relates to people who may seem to have many admirable qualities – there is a need to expose unpleasant facts about their actual conduct and to strip away pleasing but false narratives.

If history were simply words confined to books, we could perhaps be more forgiving. But the painful truth is that false narratives and their carriers get innocent people killed. Indeed, if the history contained in the preceding chapters were well known in real time, the American people might have made dramatically different choices and many people in various parts of the world – from Asia to the Middle East to Central and South America – would have been spared horrible death and injury.

For instance, if the public were aware in 1968 that Richard Nixon's operatives were torpedoing peace talks aimed at ending the Vietnam War, it is doubtful he would have been elected, let alone reelected in 1972. If Nixon had lost to Hubert Humphrey in 1968 – and if President Lyndon Johnson had completed the peace deal that he envisioned – millions of people in Indochina might be alive today and the bitter recriminations from the Vietnam War might have been substantially less at home. The United States might have had greater opportunities to deal with its many challenges.

Further, if Nixon's campaign had been called on its 1968 gambit, the GOP might have rejected the Nixonian DNA of winning by any means necessary. Instead of spending the last several decades entrenching itself in Nixon's crypto-racist Southern Strategy and mastering the dark arts of political dirty tricks, the Republicans might still be the responsible, business-oriented alternative that many of us remember from our youth.

Similarly, the 1980 election, which appears to have included a reprise of Nixon's 1968 scheme, elevated a hard-line conservative in Ronald Reagan who preached a dangerous gospel that "government is the problem." Reagan's hostility toward what government can do in a democratic Republic has weakened the ability of the United States to address structural threats to the common good. His contempt for environmental rules, for instance, contributed to America's distrust of the science of global warming, a head-in-the-sand approach that threatens the future existence of the human species.

Reagan's extravagant anti-communism further distorted how the U.S. government viewed the world. Instead of relying on objective assessments by CIA analysts, Reagan forced ideological glasses on everyone. The lenses transformed shrinking problems, like the declining Soviet Union, into giant ones and obscured emerging threats.

Thus, the United States overreacted to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by embracing "allies" who shared little of American ideals and principles. Compromises were struck with extremists in Pakistan, who exploited their new-found relationship with Washington to press ahead on building a nuclear bomb, which has destabilized South Asia. Meanwhile, a global jihad movement took root in the Afghan struggle and eventually reached out to strike America.

The failure to get the narratives right on various scandals of the Reagan-Bush-41 era contributed to the disasters of the past decade, too. If the full story of George H.W. Bush's involvement in October Surprise, Iraqgate and Iran-Contra had been told in real time, the prospects would have been slim to none that his son, George W. Bush, could have made a serious run for the presidency. Without George W. Bush's arrogance and inexperience, the 9/11 attacks might never had happened – and even if they had – a President Al Gore would not have been inclined to invade Iraq, a country that had no connection to 9/11.

Though no one can chart an alternative history – and surely other unanticipated problems would have asserted themselves – it appears likely that honest narratives about these events, if known early enough, could have spared the world much suffering, enabled a more productive allocation of the world's resources, and put the planet on a far more sustainable path.

Yet, even if the narratives could be fully corrected today – even if all Americans could look back and see clearly what had happened and how they had been deceived – the truth still might not entirely set us free. But the truth might at least free our minds to rethink the directions we have set for ourselves. By getting the narratives straight, we could begin to chart a new and better course into the future.

Obviously, more will become known about these various historic turning points as more archives are opened and as honest public servants reveal more hidden facts in memoirs and oral histories. My hope is that this book can advance that process by providing a foundation upon which a more accurate historical framework can be built. In that sense, this book has at least torn down some of the unsound historical structure that had existed on these topics.

By clearing away false narratives – and replacing them with ones grounded in facts – future historians can then add to this new structure, with their contributions fitting in more precisely with the overall architecture of what really happened. Also, by eliminating the old distortions, I hope that people who otherwise might have feared standing up to and challenging the accepted wisdom might gain courage to contribute what information they do possess.

And, finally, it must be noted that it is important to build a sound historical narrative on the best facts available, much as one would select straight and sturdy boards when framing a house. As much as this book might show that the Conventional Wisdom and the Official Story are often wrong, that does not mean they are always wrong.

Just because someone can up with a contrarian theory about some historical event does not mean that the theory is correct. Nothing can replace careful research and open-minded reporting in assessing what is real and what might just be a curious anomaly or something that is just hard to explain.

In other words, if the goal is to create as truthful a narrative as possible, it makes no sense to start tacking on unfounded conspiracy

theories. That only distorts the historical architecture in a different direction. It doesn't build a sound home for the truth.

At its core, to pursue a truthful narrative is to respect democracy. It is to embrace the fundamental principle that democracy is only meaningful if the citizens have the relevant facts. Any effort to twist the narrative – in whatever direction or for whatever reason – is to distort and to disrespect democracy. It is to strip the people of the power of self-governance. It is to believe in their manipulation as a shortcut to get some desired result, which is why so many propagandists have invested so much in devising techniques of distortion and disinformation.

Giving the people a truthful narrative – or at least one that is as accurate as can be – is to empower them with the opportunity to make the best decisions for themselves and for the planet.

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Notes

[*] For a detailed account of Election 2000, see *Neck Deep* by Robert, Sam and Nat Parry

[†] The reference to Fortas apparently was to the successful Republican-led filibuster in the Senate to block Johnson's 1968 nomination of Associate Justice Abe Fortas to replace Earl Warren as Chief Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

[‡] Tom Johnson later served as president of CNN.

[§] For reasons that remain unclear, it appears that the planned Brookings break-in never took place.

[**] For a fuller accounting of the Ladies Room documents, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[††] For details, see Robert Parry's *Fooling America* or his later book, *Lost History*.

[‡‡] When I re-interviewed, Veliotis on August 8, 2012, he said he couldn't recall precisely who the "people on high" were, but he indicated that the pre-election contacts with Israelis in 1980 were made by a rising group of foreign policy intellectuals who joined the Reagan administration in 1981 and who have since become known as the "neoconservatives." In a later e-mail, he added: "The Israelis had a very large list of potential Reagan campaign contacts."

[§§] For details, see Robert Parry's *Trick or Treason: The October Surprise Mystery*.

[***] For more details on the October Surprise role of David Rockefeller's team, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[†††] For more details on the alibis, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[‡‡‡] Robert Gates had served on President Carter's NSC staff in 1980, although by October, he had transferred back to the CIA.

[§§§] Janet Rehnquist, who oversaw the White House's politicized counterattacks against the October Surprise story, ran into a similar controversy over a politically motivated cover-up after President George W. Bush appointed her to be inspector general of the Department of Health and

Human Services. When Florida Gov. Jeb Bush was running for reelection in 2002 and faced a scandal over a possible \$571 million overpayment by the federal government to the state, an aide to Bush got Rehnquist to agree to postpone an audit, which was eventually pushed back five months guaranteeing no findings until after Bush had secured reelection. After CBS News reported on Rehnquist's apparent cover-up and Congress began to investigate, Rehnquist abruptly resigned, citing a desire to spend more time with her family.

[****] For more details about the business dealings of John Shaheen and Cyrus Hashemi, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[++++] For details, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[####] Rep. Hamilton said he had no recollection of Barcella ever asking for an extension of the October Surprise investigation.

[§§§§] For details on these aspects of the October Surprise case, see Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[*****] For more on Shackley's role in the October Surprise case, see Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.

[+++++] For more about Powell's similar behavior during the wars in Panama and the Persian Gulf, see *Neck Deep*.

[1] Craig Unger. "Boss Rove," Vanity Fair, September 2012 (<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/2012/09/karl-rove-gop-craig-unger>)

[2] Robert Draper. Do Not Ask What Good We Do.

[3] Woody Holton. Abigail Adams.

[4] Catherine Drinker Bowen. Miracle at Philadelphia.

[5] Chris DeRose, *Founding Rivals*.

[6] DeRose, *Founding Rivals*.

[7] http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_529.asp#7

[8] David Wootton, *The Essential Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers*.

[9] U.S. Appeals Court ruling, Nov. 8, 2011. [http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/055C0349A6E85D7A8525794200579735/\\$file/11-5047-1340594.pdf](http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/055C0349A6E85D7A8525794200579735/$file/11-5047-1340594.pdf)

[10] Ezra Klein, Washington Post, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/reagans-solicitor-general-health-care-is-interstate-commerce-is-this-a-regulation-of-it-yes-end-of-story/2011/08/25/gIQAmAQigS_blog.html

[11] For details, see *Neck Deep* by Robert, Sam and Nat Parry.

[12] To read Walt Rostow's memos, go to
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0451.JPG ;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0452.JPG ;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0453.JPG

[13] To see the image of Walt Rostow's 'X' Envelope, go to
<http://consortiumnews.com/2012/03/03/lbjs-x-file-on-nixons-treason/>

[14] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0486.JPG

[15] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0484.JPG

[16] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0562.JPG

[17] To see the documents, go to
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0553.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0554.JPG

[18] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0539.JPG

[19] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0462.JPG

[20] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0459.JPG

[21] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0460.JPG

[22] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0450.JPG

[23] To hear the phone call, go to
<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[24] To hear the phone call, go to
<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[25] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0437.JPG

[26] To hear the phone call, go to
<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[27] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0535.JPG

[28] To hear the phone call, go to
<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[29] See Anthony Summers's *The Arrogance of Power*. p. 305

[30] To hear the phone call, go to
<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[31] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0528.JPG

[32] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0529.JPG

[33] To hear the phone call, go to <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[34] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0456.JPG

[35] Robert Parry, Consortiumnews.com (March 3, 2012), <http://consortiumnews.com/2012/03/03/lbjs-x-file-on-nixons-treason/>

[36] To see document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0464.JPG

[37] To see document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0430.JPG

[38] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0524.JPG

[39] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0525.JPG

[40] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0423.JPG

[41] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0422.JPG

[42] To see the documents, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0521.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0522.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0523.JPG

[43] To hear phone call, go to <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[44] To hear phone call, go to <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/dictabelt.hom/highlights/may68jan69.shtm>

[45] To see the documents, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0500.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0501.JPG ;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0502.JPG ;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0503.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0504.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0505.JPG

[46] To see the documents, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0511.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0512.JPG;
http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0513.JPG

[47] To see the column, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0509.JPG

- [48] To see the column, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0508.JPG
- [49] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0414.JPG
- [50] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0413.JPG
- [51] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0408.JPG
- [52] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0406.JPG
- [53] To see the article, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0404.JPG
- [54] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0589.JPG
- [55] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0600.JPG
- [56] See Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold Schecter. The Palace File.
- [57] See Robert Parry. Secrecy & Privilege.
- [58] See Nguyen Cao Ky, *Buddha's Child*.
- [59] Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. Washington Post, June 10, 2012.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/woodward-and-bernstein-40-years-after-watergate-nixon-was-far-worse-than-we-thought/2012/06/08/gJQAIsi0NV_story.html
- [60] See J. Anthony Lucas. Nightmare.
- [61] Lucas, Nightmare.
- [62] H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (Entry for June 12, 1972)
- [63] *The New York Times* (December 12, 1972)
- [64] Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, p. 40
- [65] See Lukas, *Nightmare*.
- [66] To see Oliver's memo to Ervin, go to
<http://consortiumnews.com/oliver-ervin-memo.pdf>
- [67] *The New York Times* (December 7, 1972)
- [68] *The New York Times* (December 7, 1972)
- [69] To see the document, go to http://consortiumnews.com/IMG_0468.JPG
- [70] *The New York Times* (April 20, 1973)
- [71] Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (Entry for April 5, 1973)
- [72] *The New York Times* (April 23, 1974)
- [73] To see the text of the Russian Report, go to
<http://www.consortiumnews.com/russianreporttext.pdf>; to see the U.S. Embassy cable containing the Russian report, go to
<http://consortiumnews.com/Russian-Surprise.pdf>
- [74] To see Ben-Menashe's letters of reference, go to
<http://www.consortiumnews.com/ben-menashe-letters.pdf>
- [75] To see Ben-Menashe's declaration, go to
<http://consortiumnews.com/Doco2'Politicalpersecution'.pdf>

[76] To see the document, go to <http://consortiumnews.com/doco10Reviewthree.pdf>

[77] See Steven Emerson and Jesse Furman, "What October Surprise? The Conspiracy that Wasn't," *The New Republic* (November 18, 1991)

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