

Interview with Ray McGovern, ex CIA analyst and co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

'Bush really can't justify the taking of lives in Iraq'

As a CIA analyst for 27 years during the Cold War, Ray McGovern helped prepare National Intelligence Estimates and the President's Daily Brief. Upon retiring in 1991, McGovern received an Intelligence Commission Medal from President George H. W. Bush for his exemplary service. But following the events of 9-11, McGovern became increasingly outraged by the way the Bush administration was using intelligence in the War on Terrorism and relentlessly pursuing war with Iraq. He helped form Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, a group of 35 former intelligence professionals from the CIA, National Security Agency and other US intelligence agencies whose purpose is "speak out on the misuse of intelligence to justify war." Since then, McGovern has become one of the Bush administration's most prominent and outspoken critics. In an exclusive interview last week, McGovern explained to The Daily Star columnist **Ron Chepesiuk** his views on the Bush administration's handling of US intelligence, the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War.

Daily Star: When did you begin to have doubts about the effectiveness of the US intelligence and how the US government was handling it?

McGovern: As soon as it became clear to me that the Bush administration was going to exploit the trauma of 9-11 to make war on Iraq.

DS: Is your critique of US intelligence widespread among members of the US intelligence community?

McGovern: Certainly, but it's a complicated situation. People (in the intelligence community) have their careers, mortgages and children in college. The most important thing to remember, though, is that those people do love doing intelligence work. It's very important work. I can't imagine doing anything more important for your country.

But I believe there is a moral authority that's higher than government rules and regulations to which one must answer to when it comes to matters of war and peace. And when deliberate deception is involved, adhering to this higher moral authority means that it's important to do what you can to prevent an unnecessary war.

DS: It's interesting that George Bush, Jr. also has claimed to be responsible to a higher moral authority. What do you think of Bush referring to a higher moral authority to justify his actions in the War on Terrorism?

McGovern: He really can't justify the taking of lives in Iraq. It's demonstrably true that Congress approved the War on Iraq. But it was deceived. The war has created a constitutional crisis that I have never seen in my

40 years of watching developments in Washington very closely. I have never seen such a deliberate attempt by one branch of government to trick the other two branches. Historically, when our founding fathers wrote the constitution, they knew war was the most serious thing a leader could get their country involved with. So they were hell bent and determined that the authority to wage war would not be vested in a single person, but rather in the country's elected representatives. That's why they gave the legislative branch the exclusive right to declare war. But the Bush administration has deliberately undermined this prerogative of Congress. How? By deliberately deceiving Congress into believing that Saddam Hussein was about to cause a mushroom cloud above our cities.

DS: If your analysis is true, then a good cause can be made that George Bush should be impeached. But I can recall only one public figure -- Ralph Nader -- using the "I" word.

McGovern: John Dean and other folks who have worked in the White House have done that. The reason why none of our politicians have done it is because they are all a bunch of wimps. Their willingness to believe the stuff Bush was feeding them demonstrated that.

DS: You have also been critical of the US media and its role in this deception.

McGovern: The media represents the most dramatic change in the (US) body politic. We no longer have an independent media in this country. Thousands of examples

can be used to demonstrate that the corporations control the media. We have a media that's slavishly devoted to the administration's line. Incredibly, Fox News is what most Americans watch. Europeans who come to America are astonished by what they see and hear in our media. It's like Radio Moscow.

DS: Bush should be vulnerable because of what's happened since 9-11, but he is leading the presidential polls at this moment. I wouldn't bet against him to win in November. How do you explain this?

McGovern: Remember Bob Woodward's book (*Plan of Attack*). Woodward asked Bush how do you feel about the fact that no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq? The President answered, "You must be part of the elite." Woodward said, "What do you mean by that?" Bush answered: "Only the elite care about that." So Bush puts out lie after lie and the media reports them. It's the old Joseph Goebbels tactic. You say it three times and people start believing it. Say it five times and most people believe it.

DS: You have said that anybody who wants to know what's going on with the Bush administration should go to the Project for a New American Century website (http://newamericancentury.org). Could you please explain why?

McGovern: At the end of the Gulf War in 1991, Bush talked about the "New World Order." There could have been one, but that (first) war with Iraq went to everybody's heads. Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and their (neo- conservative) crowd

formulated a strategy for the future. It would be Pax America because the US was the sole remaining super power. We would prevent the growth of any rival to our power, and we would exert our power and influence wherever and whenever we felt like. A document called the Defense Planning Guidance outlined this strategy. It was so extreme that Bush I, on the advice of James Baker and Brent Scowcroft, threw it into a circular file. They (the necons) were considered so extreme that during Bush I's term of office they were kept in lower level positions. Imagine our surprise when Bush Jr. gets elected in 2000. Who comes with him? The crazies. They are in charge now. Those (neo con) documents were written with the help of people in the Israeli government. Netanyahu and others. So the vision is crooked, and there is dual loyalty.

DS: So are you saying Israel is playing a role in shaping US policy (in the War on Terrorism)?

McGovern: It's become very clear to me that the Iraq War was fought at least as much for perceived Israeli strategic objectives as it was for our objectives. Ariel Sharon has so cleverly manipulated our government that the US is now in a position where Muslims and Arabs throughout the world hate us as much as they do the Israelis. That's why they are coming to Iraq to fight the US. Now Sharon is trying to ensure that US can't extricate itself from Iraq. That's why Sharon wouldn't come to Washington to give a boast to Bush's campaign until he signed on

to his strategic view. Meanwhile, American fathers, mothers, wives and husbands are fighting and dying in a war in Iraq for Ariel Sharon and his distorted view of what's best for Israel.

DS: That's interesting analysis. If you say that in the US, of course, you will be immediately branded as anti-Semitic. How do you handle that criticism?

McGovern: I said some of those things in an op-ed piece I wrote for the Miami Herald newspaper about a year ago. The Council of Rabbis in Greater Miami sent a diatribe to the Miami Herald about how I was anti-Semitic and had a hatred of Israel in my heart. They insisted the Herald publish the piece and it did. I was born and raised in the Bronx (New York City) and spent 20 years there. I made and still have many Jewish friends there. Yeshiva University awarded my father an honorary doctorate. I know Jewish people and I love them. I'm not against the Jewish people or the state of Israel. I am against the right wing terrorist Likud government in Tel Aviv. The truth will keep one free.

DS: What's your opinion of the widely held view in Bangladesh that the Iraq War was about oil?

McGovern: It was about oil. Bush, Jr. faced a serious problem when he came to office. There had just been brown outs and oil shortages. For the first time in our country's history, we were importing more oil than we were using. That's why Cheney's Energy Task Force was so secret. It had to come up with answers critical to our country's future. We had a

choice. Either we go with alternative sources of energy or we go with oil.

To make a long story short, Cheney can't make a lot of money from alternative sources of energy, so the decision was made to go for Iraq, which has the second largest proven oil reserves. Oil was the first reason for war with Iraq; Israel, the second.

DS: But the Bush administration's script for Iraq hasn't gone according to plan and there is the danger of the situation spinning out of control.

McGovern: The Bush administration doesn't have a clue about what's going on in Iraq. Turning the situation over to the UN in a real way would be the sensible thing to do and would avoid the real possibility of getting us into a Vietnam type situation. But what are we going to do? God knows. Now we are bombing the hell out of Fallujah and the holy city of Najaf. It doesn't make much sense unless Sharon is running our foreign policy. Cheney has a picture on his office wall of the nuclear reactor in Syria that Israel destroyed in 1981. The UN -- the US included -- unanimously condemned that action. But in 2002 Cheney praised that action and said it was an effective way to deal with terrorism. So Cheney and Sharon are running our country. They are doing a wonderful job for Israel, but not a hell of a lot for our young people fighting in Iraq.

DS: Let's talk about the 9-11 Commission. Is it going to do anything that will help us in the War on Terrorism?

McGovern: The Commission is a

political construct devised by Bush and Cheney. It's led by a Republican who knows nothing about Washington and brags about it. It consists of lawyers and politicians, and both. Tell me that the Commission is representative of the American people and those who died on 9-11. It's laughable. The Commission will not answer the big questions.

Besides, its membership is so hopelessly divided that Americans will have to decide for themselves.

DS: George Tenet (CIA Director) said it will take at least five years to reform the US intelligence apparatus so it works the way we want it to. Is that a realistic timetable?

McGovern: I hate to say it, but Tenet has absolutely no credibility. He is the antithesis of what is needed with respect to intelligence in the post 9-11 era. He is political animal. His career has been spent pleasing people. If we are to really reform the intelligence infrastructure we need integrity at the top. We need to have a (CIA) director who is not necessary in intelligence and doesn't need the job, but who is not afraid to tell the President the truth. We haven't had that kind of CIA director in 25 years.

DS: So why has Tenet survived the intelligence failures? Because he knows how to play the political game or because he knows where the skeletons are buried?

McGovern: It's both. He probably has a computer disk that documents the 37 warnings he gave Bush from June to September 2001. But Tenet also does what he's told. (As related in Woodward's book) Bush

told Tenet: "We need an intelligence estimate that backs up what I say in my speech on Iraq. Can you do that, George?" Tenet said, "It's slam dunk, Mr. President. A slam dunk!"

In the old days, the director would not have come up with a totally contrived estimate. The CIA was established with the idea that there should be one agency in government that doesn't have a political agenda. That's why the CIA was not placed under the Department of Defense or State.

In the old days, the President would get the unvarnished truth. The State Department would tell the President that the Soviets are 10 feet tall. We'd say, "No way. They are 5'9."

The President has allowed the intelligence community to be corrupted so now he has no place to go for a straight answer. Today, when the President asks: "What's going to happen if I bomb the hell out of Fallujah?" He is not going to hear this from the intelligence community: "That's crazy. It's going to lengthen the lines for al-Qaida by ten percent." What he's going to hear instead is: "It's a slam dunk, Mr. President, a slam dunk."

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Abu Ghraib another My Lai for the United States?



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

WITH the increasing tension, armed conflict and political uncertainty in Iraq, America could really ill-afford the huge indelible smear received on its image by the revelation of the abuse, torture, rape and killing perpetrated by American soldiers in Saddam's notorious prison-cum-torture contraption at Abu Ghraib. The grueling Congressional hearings of the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, by the Committees, both at the Senate and the House, have opened up an

unsavory part of the current situation in Iraq not only to the world at large but especially to the generally unsuspecting people of America. The horrific pictures of abuse, torture and human indignity in their graphic details and existence of many more and worse such photos as well as videos of similar heinous acts shocked the people to no end.

President George W Bush condemned the acts, stressed these were not consistent with the values of the

American people and termed these un-American. He cited many good things done by the American men and women in uniform all over the world. The alleged crimes committed by a small number of soldiers were being duly investigated, he declared. Secretary of Defense and the Abu Ghraib prison commander apologized and assured that repetition of such incidents would not take place. But both the Democratic and Republican lawmakers of America made Rumsfeld most uncomfortable, to say the least, during the Congressional hearings by asking searching questions in marathon sessions. Some of the Democrats, especially Senator Edward Kennedy, reiterated their demand for resignation of the Secretary of Defense, but several Republican colleagues, quite understandably so, were less rigorous in their critical interaction with Rumsfeld.

The Congressional Commission grilled Donald Rumsfeld, who was assisted by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Myers and his colleagues, and sought to assess possible lapses made by the Defense Secretary and the Pentagon in the war in Iraq in recent times, especially on the issue of alleged abuse and atrocities committed by American soldiers on Iraqi prisoners and detainees. Rumsfeld recalled vaguely it was in the middle of January when he came to know of the possibility of such abuses in Abu Ghraib prison, despite the source being the report of a General from the theatre of war. But Rumsfeld assigned no importance to such allegations and did not call for a full and urgent report, not to speak of asking for an investigation. He stated he had seen the photos for the first time only the evening before the Congressional hearings, that too through the media. But Rumsfeld was unable to explain why it took as long as several months for him and the top brasses in Pentagon to see the vivid pictographic evidences of such abuses and to take appropriate action. To some, it was incredible, suggesting an attempt to cover up, without saying so in so many words. That is why the demand for Rumsfeld's resignation came out again. He said he would resign from his office only when he would think he was not effective, but he would not resign due merely to political pressure. President Bush, on the other hand, dismissed the possibility of firing his trusted Defense Secretary.

While the whole world is deeply worried and dismayed by hearing the reports and seeing the pictures of the inhuman atrocities at Abu Ghraib, the impact on American people has been perceived to be less than it was expected by others. In an opinion poll run by the CNN a majority of US citizens approved the conduct of war in Iraq by Donald Rumsfeld, though President's popularity dwindled a little. The media

and the people of the Arab and Muslim world were, indeed, aghast at seeing the pictures and horrified at the prospect of the existence of many more even worse pictures than those already published. They claimed that mere apologies would not suffice. The Americans, in bid to assuage the critics, pledged to consider payment of compensation to those, who had been the victims of abuse in Abu Ghraib. They assured that the detainees would be treated as per provisions of the Geneva Conventions. Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Tony Blair also apologized for the alleged atrocities committed by British soldiers on Iraqi prisoners and vowed to punish those found guilty.

Donald Rumsfeld, while revealing Pentagon's possession of more demeaning photographs and videos of the alleged abuses and atrocities, opined that publication of these photos and videos would only infuriate the people, indicating the Arabs, further. At the same time, there was a demand from the Congressional law-givers for the revelation of all available information on this issue for the people to comprehend the nature and degree of the crimes and for taking remedial measures. Any attempt to hide incriminating evidence by anyone for any purpose would tantamount to abating and encouraging crime. Evidently, these inhuman and degrading incidents can not be supported and must not be condoned by the people, who value human rights, dignity and respect for mankind. It is strange and ironic that the torture chamber of Saddam turned into the chamber of abuse by some American soldiers. But, the crimes can not and must not go unpunished. Accordingly, seven American soldiers have already been indicted and some more, including senior officers, may perhaps experience the same fate. On the other hand, it appears that Donald Rumsfeld, who accepted full responsibility for the incidents, will not resign. Nor President Bush, as declared already, would be agreeable to fire his trusted Secretary of Defense.

The Democratic Presidential hopeful, John Kerry, went a step farther. He declared that the responsibility (President Truman called it a "buck" in justifying dropping of atom bombs) did not stop mid-way, but went all the way to the Oval Office (of the President). He declared that America did not need a new Secretary of Defense, it needed a new President. Such a demand is not unexpected of the arch rival of the President, especially at the height of the election campaign. Yet, election is an uncertain phenomenon, both at home or abroad. But many of President's well-wishers would perhaps tend to advise him to get rid of his Secretary of Defense not merely to placate the latter's critics but, perhaps, to reduce a liability on Presidential re-election. Anyway, irrespective of the outcome of the election, as the massacre of My Lai in Vietnam has haunted the Americans since long, will the memories of the un-American acts of Abu Ghraib do the same?

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