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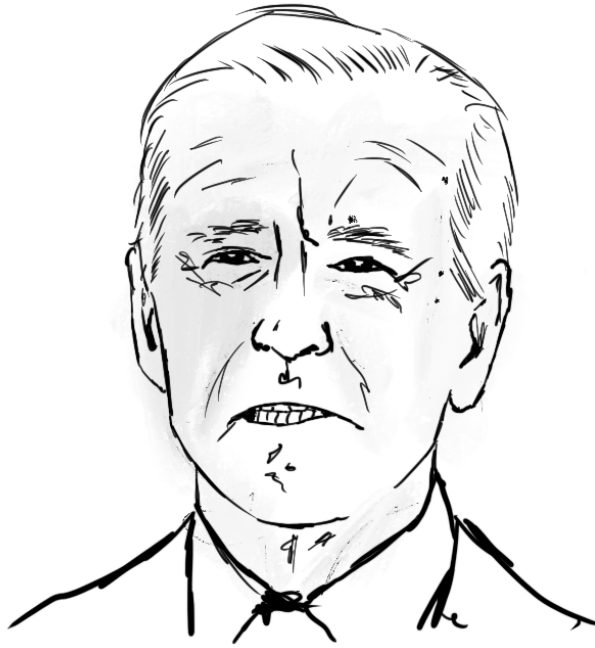
European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

30.12.2020

An Open Letter to Biden: Selecting a CIA Director



Drawing by Nathaniel St. Clair

Dear President-elect Biden,

I'm assuming that you and your team are still debating the selection of a director for the Central Intelligence Agency. I hope that you don't think me presumptuous for making some suggestions. I'm doing this on the basis of my 24 years of experience as a CIA intelligence analyst as well as my candid testimony before the Senate intelligence committee several decades ago regarding the confirmation process.

I believe that CIA leadership is particularly important at this juncture if the agency is to regain its credibility. Donald Trump's efforts to politicize the intelligence community combined with the unfortunate appointment as director of Gina Haspel, who was heavily involved in the torture and abuse program, have undermined that credibility. Haspel's

confirmation created cynicism toward the process among many CIA officials—both active and retired. I'm also concerned that the media rumors point to the possible appointment of Mike Morell, who has been actively campaigning for the assignment, to succeed Haspel. This would be particularly unfortunate given Morell's active denial of the illegality and immorality of the torture program as well as his defense of the destruction of the torture tapes.

Unfortunately, the past 40 years have not produced the kind of director that the CIA requires in terms of experience, character, and integrity. The directors have come from Congress, the military, the CIA itself, and the political community.

No director in the 73-year history of the CIA has come from the Department of State, yet senior Foreign Service Officers have a deep understanding of the role and importance of both intelligence analysis at home and clandestine operations abroad. Naming a Foreign Service Officer to head CIA would be ground-breaking and would contribute to reinvigorating the Agency's morale and competence. An outstanding candidate for the position would be the current president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace—former deputy secretary of state William Burns. I believe that he would be confirmed easily.

I would like to explain why I consider the backgrounds of previous directors to have ill-prepared them for the position. The directors from Capitol Hill (Porter Goss and George Tenet) were too close to their respective administrations; both engaged in the politicization of intelligence on behalf of President George W. Bush. In the worst case, this contributed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Good intelligence officers have to be willing to make enemies in telling truth to power; Goss and Tenet were too busy supporting their political friends.

Several directors with CIA experience (Robert Gates and Gina Haspel) had serious confirmation problems because of the politicization of intelligence and Iran-Contra in the case of Gates and the involvement in torture and the destruction of torture evidence in the case of Haspel. Previous CIA directors with intelligence experience (Allen Dulles, Richard Helms, and William Casey) proved to be embarrassments: Dulles was forced to resign over the Bay of Pigs; Helms was convicted to lying to a congressional committee; and Casey's fingerprints were all over the Iran-Contra disaster. Haspel's predecessor, John Brennan, should have been removed for interfering with the Senate intelligence committee's investigation of the torture and abuse program, a violation of the separation of powers.

The command structure of the military doesn't provide a healthy background for dealing with a secret intelligence agency that paradoxically requires openness and intense debate within its walls. The recent experiences of Generals Michael Hayden and David Petraeus testify to the dangerous militarization of the intelligence community over the past two decades. Hayden immediately set out to weaken the Office of the Inspector General; Petraeus tried to reverse CIA's support for verification of the Iran nuclear accord. Both lacked experience in the world of strategic intelligence. I would make an exception for Admiral Stansfield Turner in

the late 1970s, who recovered from a rocky start at the helm. He was essentially a man of great character and integrity.

Various political appointees have been disappointing. William Webster and Leon Panetta were excellent public servants in their day, but by the time they arrived at the CIA they weren't prepared to stand up to the machinations of the operations directorate. James Woolsey was a huge failure, and soon wore out his welcome with both the Clinton administration and the congressional oversight committees. John Deutch had wanted to be secretary of defense, and used his position at the CIA to cooperate with the Pentagon's coverup of the exposure of troops in Desert Storm to chemical agents as well as ceding the CIA's imagery analysis capability to the Pentagon, where it doesn't belong.

William Burns would be an excellent choice to direct the CIA. He is one of the most skilled American diplomats of the past half-century, cut from the same cloth as George Kennan and Chip Bohlen. Burns was only the second serving career diplomat to become deputy secretary of state. The Carnegie Endowment is the oldest international affairs think tank in the United States; Burns manages a global network of 140 scholars across six countries. He has received awards from the Department of Defense, the CIA, and the Intelligence Community.

The appointment of Burns would send an important signal about the revival of public service, which has been demeaned for the past four years, and for the importance of the entire intelligence community, not simply the CIA. Much of CIA's difficulty over the past 40 years can be attributed to mediocre leadership. The CIA would be the major beneficiary of such an exemplary appointment to an institution that has become too insular and parochial.

Sincerely,

Melvin A. Goodman

CIA Analyst, 1966-1990

DECEMBER 29, 2020

***Melvin A. Goodman** is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent book is "American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump" (Opus Publishing), and he is the author of the forthcoming "The Dangerous National Security State" (2020)." Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org.*