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## What Has US Militarism Wrought?

March 4, 2013

**Exclusive:** A half century ago, President Eisenhower warned the American people about the “unwarranted influence” of a Military-Industrial Complex, but that influence still managed to pervade U.S. politics and policies. In a new book, ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman takes stock of those changes, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

Most Americans get the gist of President Dwight Eisenhower’s 1961 warning about the influence of the “military-industrial complex,” how money and jobs would tie congressmen to the interests of arms manufacturers in their districts. But there are other less obvious, though equally insidious, ways militarism has distorted the Republic.

Since World War II, even institutions that were supposed to provide some check on this power of military spending have been corrupted – from the U.S. press corps to academic scholars to analysts of the Central Intelligence Agency. The money from militarism has seeped far downstream from actual arms manufacturing.

In recent decades, pro-military propaganda often has won out over journalism; military-contractor-funded think tanks have overwhelmed honest research; and pro-military government officials have beaten down the professional CIA analysts who were supposed to provide objective information to the President and his top advisers.

This dangerous phenomenon is the topic of *National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism* by former CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman. It is a book from the point of view of an

insider who experienced many of the key moments of this spasmodic lurch from a civilian Republic to a militaristic Empire. Goodman provides both an overview and a dissection of the crisis.

In Goodman's account, there were many crossroads where the United States could have headed off in a less militaristic direction. But time and again the cumulative pressure from the hundreds of billions of dollars in military spending pushed decision-makers down a path toward more militarism.

At various junctions, some politicians beginning with Eisenhower pushed back against the pressures but typically succumbed to propaganda proclaiming a new foreign threat or accusing an officeholder of unmanly weakness. Politicians often responded by supporting some new war or larding on more military spending.

Tough-guy-ism also prevailed in the national news media where journalists and columnists feared being labeled "anti-American" or "soft" on some foreign adversary. The major Washington think tanks, even ones thought to be left of center, "hired-up" with hardliners to avoid the marginalizing label, "liberal."

This drift toward militarism grew stronger as the memories of World War II grew dimmer. As Goodman noted, Eisenhower took pride in ending the Korean War and avoiding subsequent hot wars during his presidency, although he did dabble in covert operations sponsored by the new CIA. He used these dangerous tools to oust leaders like Iran's Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 and Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.

Nevertheless, as Goodman wrote, Eisenhower reflected on his eight years as President by saying, "the United States never lost a soldier or a foot of ground during my administration. We kept the peace."

### **Shrinking from Pentagon Pressure**

Subsequent presidents couldn't match Eisenhower's claim about keeping the peace or preventing the deaths of soldiers, but some did press for arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, often bucking the desires of Pentagon brass. Eisenhower's four successors – John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford – also struggled with the consequences of carelessly entering and painfully departing the Vietnam War.

Then, after a brief post-war respite in the 1970s, the political pressure was on again to invest more in the U.S. military. Jimmy Carter began the build-up in part to counter criticism of his "weakness," but he still fell in Election 1980 to the more belligerent Ronald Reagan.

With Reagan's presidency, the post-Vietnam skepticism about the use of force – the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" lingering inside the U.S. news media and in parts of Congress – was routed. Reagan made militarism seem like fun again, whether through proxy support of right-wing "freedom fighters" or quick-and-easy military actions like the invasion of Grenada.

Goodman's insights in his book are most significant for this era of Reagan's rise (from the mid-to-late 1970s through the 1980s), a time when the final checks and balances on American militarism were giving way and when Goodman watched from his front-row seat as a senior CIA analyst responsible for assessing the Soviet threat.

Goodman traced the early stages of politicizing the CIA's analysis to President Nixon's appointment of James Schlesinger to head the agency in early 1973 amid the deepening Watergate scandal. Nixon also had grown disaffected from the CIA because of its critical views on the Vietnam War.

According to Goodman, "Schlesinger put nothing in writing, but he assembled the Agency's Soviet experts and warned them, 'This agency is going to stop fucking Richard Nixon.' I was one of those Soviet analysts. Schlesinger's objective was to rein in the CIA, which had produced analysis that challenged Nixon's policy on Vietnam." [*National Insecurity*, p. 245]

### **Perverting Intelligence**

After Nixon's Watergate-related resignation – and with Election 1976 looming – President Ford found himself under increasing pressure from the Republican Right, especially from the insurgent candidacy of California Gov. Ronald Reagan. So, Ford looked for ways to accommodate the Right's desire for a tougher anti-Soviet stance.

The opportunity presented itself when an ad hoc group of right-wing and neoconservative intellectuals demanded access to the CIA's raw intelligence on Soviet military capabilities with the idea of writing their own analysis.

CIA Director William Colby opposed the idea, understanding that it would apply political pressure on the CIA analysts who were supposed to give the President and other senior officials an objective assessment of global threats. However, Ford himself was under intense political pressure and thus turned to former Republican National Chairman George H.W. Bush to replace Colby as CIA director. Goodman recalled:

"Colby would not allow a clearly polemical group, led by Harvard professor Richard Pipes and referred to as Team B, to hijack the production of intelligence estimates. Bush had no qualms about doing so. Ford removed Colby, and Pipes – with the help of [White House Chief of Staff Dick] Cheney and [Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld – named a team of right-wing academics and former government officials to draft their own intelligence estimates on Soviet military power. ...

"Team B predicted a series of Soviet weapons developments that never occurred. These included directed energy weapons, mobile ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] systems, and anti-satellite capabilities. Pipes's team concluded (falsely) that the Soviet Union rejected nuclear parity, was bent on fighting and winning a nuclear war, and was radically increasing its military spending." [p. 247]

Though Team B's assessment was wildly off the mark, it had the predictable political impact on CIA analysts, who recognized that their careers would be damaged if they insisted on detecting the deepening cracks in the Soviet economic system and Moscow's weakening military clout.

“Having seen the writing on the wall, the CIA team known as Team A exaggerated its own assessments of Soviet military spending and Soviet military technology,” Goodman wrote. [p. 248]

The consequences of these exaggerations would be profound and long-lasting. Before leaving office in 1977, CIA Director Bush embraced the hyped-up judgment on Soviet might and the alarmist estimate impinging on President Jimmy Carter's efforts to rein in the military budget as well as undercutting his efforts at arms control.

### **Reagan's Buildup**

After Reagan crushed Carter in Election 1980, these extreme assessments became the basis for a major U.S. arms buildup. Inside the CIA, a new generation of careerists also recognized that they could advance themselves by endorsing the bogus estimates. For instance, Goodman noted that the CIA's ambitious young deputy director, Robert Gates, “used this worst-case analysis in a series of speeches in the 1980s to ingratiate himself with the Reagan administration. ... [p. 247]

“In the 1980s, ... CIA director [William] Casey and deputy director Gates ... conducted their own public campaign to exaggerate Soviet capabilities and justify greater U.S. spending on President Reagan's ‘Star Wars’ program. ... [p. 253]

“It took a decade for the CIA to correct the record and lower those inflated estimates. But the damage had been done. The Reagan administration used these inflated estimates of Soviet military power to garner a trillion and a half dollars in defense spending in the 1980s. These vast expenditures were directed against a Soviet military threat that was greatly exaggerated and a Soviet Union that was in decline.” [p. 248]

When the Soviet bloc began falling apart in the late 1980s, Gates and other CIA bigwigs continued to miss this historic development because they were essentially programmed to ignore intelligence on Moscow's weaknesses. However, when the reality could no longer be denied, they and other right-wingers simply adjusted the narrative and declared that Reagan's military buildup and his other aggressive strategies had brought the Soviets to their knees.

Thus, the Reagan Legacy was manufactured. Instead of accepting the truth, that the Soviets had been on a long trajectory of decline – attributable in large part to their inefficient economic system and U.S. technological advances around the space program in the 1960s – and that the Reagan team had lied about the Soviet reality to justify massive new military spending, the Right had a simple storyline: Reagan told Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to “tear down that wall” and, presto, the Cold War was over.

The “Reagan won the Cold War” judgment is pretty much Official Washington's conventional wisdom today, although as Goodman wrote: “Reagan is falsely credited with bringing down the

Soviet Union and ending the Cold War, but in truth the Reagan administration, with the support of disinformation from Casey and Gates, inflated the Soviet threat and then claimed false credit for its demise.” [p. 285]

### **Inviting the Afghan Mess**

The politicizing of intelligence had other negative consequences. For instance, amid Reagan’s hyped-up alarms about the Soviet Union, the United States and Saudi Arabia funneled billions of dollars in military aid to Islamic fundamentalists fighting a Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan.

To get the supplies into Afghanistan, the Reagan administration also had to appease the Pakistani Islamic dictatorship in part by demanding that CIA analysts look the other way on Pakistan’s development of a nuclear bomb and to keep what information the CIA had away from members of Congress.

“In 1986,” Goodman wrote, “CIA deputy director Gates issued an ultimatum that there would be no reporting on Pakistani nuclear activities in the *National Intelligence Daily*, the CIA product that was sent to the Senate and House intelligence committees.” [p. 255]

The results of Reagan’s Afghan operation included Pakistan becoming a nuclear-weapons state (arguably the most dangerous fact in today’s world) and Afghanistan falling under the control of the Taliban (which hosted fellow Islamic extremist Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terror organization).

But the Reagan worship that followed the Cold War largely drove the course of events over the last two decades in both Republican and Democratic administrations. For instance, Goodman’s *National Insecurity* is sharply critical of President Bill Clinton’s lack of a strategic vision that might have enabled the United States to move from Cold War paranoia to a much less militarized position in the world.

“President Clinton simply paid insufficient attention to foreign policy,” Goodman wrote, “and was too ready to read public opinion polls before acting. ... As a result, President Clinton left no legacy in foreign policy or national security policy.” [p. 141]

Rather than chart a path toward a more peaceful future, Clinton tended to bow to military hardliners. “Clinton became the first president to fail to stand up to the Pentagon on a major arms control treaty, when he refused to challenge the Pentagon’s opposition to the CTBT,” Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, wrote Goodman. [p. 128]

### **Return of the Neocons**

Clinton’s eight years of drift were followed by a return of the neocons under George W. Bush and – after the 9/11 attacks – a new surge in military spending to fight Bush’s “global war on terror” and to finish off old adversaries like Iraq’s Saddam Hussein.

The neocons, who had cut their political teeth on exaggerating the Soviet menace in the 1970s and 1980s, returned to their old tricks, hyping the threat from Iraq in 2002-2003. They were again aided and abetted by career-oriented officials at the CIA, including the malleable director George Tenet who offered little resistance to more politicization.

Goodman wrote: “When the CIA’s director, George Tenet, made his infamous remark [in December 2002] that it would be a ‘slam dunk’ to provide intelligence to justify going to war, he was referring to the president’s demands for intelligence to take to the American people and the international community regarding the need for war, not to support for the Bush administration’s decision regarding the use of force against Iraq. The decision to invade was made long before the intelligence was in; Bush was merely seeking intelligence to rationalize the case for war.” [p. 151]

Even CIA officials with greater integrity – the likes of senior intelligence analyst Paul. R. Pillar – bent to White House demands. Goodman wrote, “Pillar finally conceded in a PBS *Frontline* documentary that he was directly responsible for militarizing intelligence for the Bush administration. In the documentary, broadcast in June 2006, Pillar said that the White Paper [justifying the Iraq invasion] was ‘clearly requested and published for policy advocacy purposes ... to strengthen the case for going to war with the American public.’” [p. 173]

Goodman added: “The bottom line on the militarization of intelligence was that the Bush administration cherry-picked the intelligence it wanted, whether it was bogus intelligence on Niger’s uranium industry or unsubstantiated intelligence on Saddam’s links to bin Laden.” [p. 179]

## **Obama’s Failure**

But neither Bush’s violations of international law nor the political corruption from excessive militarism were confronted when Barack Obama became president in 2009.

Obama failed “to address the moral issues he inherited from the Bush administration,” Goodman wrote, adding that Obama’s “unwillingness to explore the conduct of torture and abuse is arguably the president’s greatest failure, because it ignored the criminality of the recent past as well as domestic and international law, and perhaps insured that a future president would resort to such practices.” [p. 231]

Obama even kept on Bush’s military high command, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who had emerged from retirement in 2006 as nearly everyone in Washington forgot his deeply checkered past.

Goodman wrote: “The Defense Department in the hands of Bob Gates became more self-aggrandizing in its accumulation of power and influence. When Obama, unwilling to roil the waters, took the unusual and unprecedented step of retaining his predecessor’s secretary of defense, it appeared that the country would not soon disentangle itself from a decade of irresponsible governance.” [p. 191]

Gates repeatedly undercut the inexperienced Obama, such as when Gates refused the President's request for exit options on the Afghan War and instead only provided proposals for escalating the conflict and adopting a long-term counterinsurgency strategy. Gates's insubordination continued through his farewell tour in 2011.

As Goodman noted, Gates "took hardline positions against a full withdrawal from Iraq; against beginning the withdrawal from Afghanistan; against significantly reducing the defense budget; and against reforming the Pentagon's weapons acquisition process. In his last week, he traveled to Baghdad and Kabul, where he contradicted President Obama's positions on Iraq and Afghanistan." [p. 201]

So, more than two decades after the disappearance of the Soviet Union – and a decade after George W. Bush's unprovoked invasion of Iraq – the military-industrial complex is alive and well, still operating much as Eisenhower warned it would:

"This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government. ...

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

Goodman's book, *National Insecurity*, represents a valuable summation of how that "misplaced power" has indeed persisted. Beyond his prescriptions for finally curbing the money that feeds the military-industrial complex, Goodman also recommends a national recognition that the United States must finally see itself realistically as part of the community of nations, not as a self-directed policeman.

"The United States must abandon its notion of 'exceptionalism,' which has led this country to gratuitously deploy military forces overseas to advance U.S. values," Goodman wrote. [p.367]

That recommendation – along with the book's other observations – carry substantial weight coming from a former senior CIA analyst, an insider who witnessed first-hand how the military-industrial complex corrupted the Republic.