

Strategic Mendacity

by [G. Murphy Donovan](#) (April 2021)



Agent Orange, Leon Golub, 1993

Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us.—JFK

President Donald J. Trump's term in office was tumultuous, some say revolutionary. Others might call it chaotic. Many of Trump's domestic initiatives are already undone by partisan executive orders. Sorting Trump's foreign policy revolution is both more difficult and infinitely more hazardous for several

reasons. Domestic programs, for the most part, cater to constituencies whilst foreign policy requires extra-national cooperation. Domestic policy might be emotional, but bread and butter issues, unlike national security policies, are seldom existential.

There was a time when Americans believed that politics stopped at the border. Foreign policy was thought to be too important to be partisan. Today, the same animus that poisons domestic conversations infects national security analysis. Theoretically, consensus in both venues should be a function of good data and sober analysis.

And prudence cautions us that the unknown is often more consequential than belief. And what we know to be true, yet ignore, is often more significant than knowledge or ignorance. No matter how efficient or omnivorous the collection, data and information are not truth.

Presumably, a total of 16 Intelligence agencies underwrites American strategy, foreign policy, and national security deliberations today. In practice, US government policy is supported by thousands of contractors or academic institutions. Much of what passes for “agency” research or analysis is really a classified sutler product, “paper for profit” in the jargon of the think tank industry, commercial or academic.



The Vietnam era *Pentagon Papers* is an iconic piece of

TOP SECRET contract (RAND Corporation) analysis gone awry. The RAND report chronicled a civil war in Vietnam and – a larger domestic war on truth. Both conflicts lasted for more than a decade. The culprit in the Vietnam fiasco was an Intelligence Community that seldom “spoke truth to power.”

Today, there are nearly 2000 think tanks in America alone, pushing expensive paper at various government agencies. Fifty eight percent of the think tank industry in the US has been created since 1997.

Clearly, the national security megaplex is a tower of babble. Size itself is now a problem. Too much money chasing too little that matters.

On one hand, you might argue that multiple voices represent analytical diversity or a useful marketplace of ideas. On the other hand, you could ask what civil servants get paid to do if most government thinking is done by contractors. Truth is, we don't know whose fingerprints are on what; the good, bad or ugly in national security collection, research and analysis.

Anonymity of both fact and interpretation in the national security business is insured by an opaque and self-serving security and a classification system that is designed, primarily, to prevent citizens, not spies, from auditing national security products. Little that you read in any TOP SECRET National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) is not available to a well-read or diligent civilian expert. Indeed, the systemic group-think of agency reports is a handicap not an asset. Consider also that no Intelligence contractor, or agency for that matter, has a fiduciary interest in telling Uncle Sam what he doesn't want to hear.

The purpose of most operational or analytical classifications is to limit the exposure of operators or originators. CYA (cover your ass) and “plausibility

deniability” are common colloquial tropes invoked throughout the US Intelligence Community.

Indiscriminate blanket classification justifies another shibboleth, the need to protect “sources and methods.” Alas, collection and espionage today are international businesses. All developed nations have programs that use agents, imagery and electronic systems to monitor friend and foe alike. Indeed, you could argue today that the United States has the largest, most expensive, albeit inert, Intelligence condominium in the world. Big Brother’s surveillance empire is augmented now by data-sharing partnerships with most of the world’s largest commercial Internet and communications systems.

Washington has a legion of big sisters in Silicon Valley and elsewhere these days. The modern surveillance state has confirmed George Orwell as a dystopian prophet. Government and commercial covert “meta data” agreements are pay-to-play rackets where Intelligence agencies gets actionable and personal data from industry, without warrants, in return for an unregulated dotcom market where Big Tech is able to monetize, or weaponize, information at will. With consumer algorithms, fraud or voter manipulation in democratic republics is not just possible, it is inevitable. Indeed, we are better at keeping such matters from ourselves than we are at keeping the same secrets from foreign spies by any measure.

The American Intelligence megaplex is not unique, nor is it the most sophisticated. Arguably, China is the gold standard today, not just their technology, but Beijing is not burdened by virtue signals, partisan subversion, or security paranoia. Deceit is the wool that impairs the vision of “Free” World Intelligence and ill-served policy mandarins. Chinese domestic surveillance is not just open, but its sources, methods, and purposes are transparent. Indeed, Chinese snooping openly serves the state before the market. This is not to rationalize totalitarian methods, but merely to point

out that official candor is often, in itself, more useful for governance than corrosive deceit or security paranoia.

Public cooperation, common knowledge as they say, is politically and patriotically fungible. Where success matters, the Chinese are overachievers. And if social stability is a key to national success, Beijing is running the table in many areas. Indeed, contemporary Chinese Capital Communism is not so much a Marxist contradiction, as it is an arranged marriage of convenience. The Chinese, are literally selling the rope needed to hang American surveillance capitalism. When everything or anything is for sale at the top, nothing has value—especially national sovereignty.

Pervasive domestic secrecy is as expensive as it is unmanageable and unworkable. For example, sources and methods that used to be reserved for Intelligence operations over there are now commonplace over here. The various false flags and partisan plots that followed the 2016 presidential election are probative. The Director of CIA personally carried water for at least one wholly fabricated and false partisan narrative, the notorious Steele dossier. The Steele caper clearly involved the CIA, the Democrat Party, British SIS, and possibly the Russian FSB. So much for any distinctions amongst patriots, allies, and enemies.

British Intelligence suffers from the same ailment that cripples American spooks. Governments come and go, but the deep state, the embedded social left, abides.

Partisan domestic meddling by Intelligence operatives and federal cops is proof positive that these institutions are not only above the law, but now too big and too autonomous to control. Even the Glen Greenwald school of journalism is alarmed today. Threats to freedom should be too obvious to ignore. Alas, the American Intelligence Community, having taken its eye off the ball, is now part of the national security problem.

The enemy is us.

The American surveillance state is an unprecedented collection system that sits atop a demonstrably incompetent, and toxically biased, analytical apparatus. Metadata is superfluous to any system where all "key judgements" are foregone conclusions. Nearly 50 years after Vietnam, American Intelligence skills are still at war with candor.

By forgetting primary purposes, the Intelligence Community provides aid and comfort to nations or ideologies that seek to harm or defeat America. When countries like Iran chant "death to America," and imperials like China claim to be "at war" with America, we ignore such threats at our peril. If you cannot, or will not, listen to what comes from the camel's mouth, some spit in the eye should come as no surprise. Warped Intelligence now seems to precede even worse foreign policy.

American foreign affairs, at the moment, are wedded to several spurious propositions, contrived Intelligence fictions really, about Russia, China, and the *Ummah* (Muslim World); all hostage to a kind of naive Utopian globalism metastasizing at the expense of enlightened values, national security, and nationalism.

Consider Brexit a shot across the Utopian bow. The EU is fast becoming an archipelago of indigestible Muslim ghettos, no-go zones. Muslim immigration now has all the earmarks of a cultural or religious crusade. Ironically, those very small wars in the *Ummah*, presumably fought in the name of global security, actually provide much of the stimuli for the Muslim immigrant blitz into the free world.

Russia

A golden opportunity was lost when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and the Soviet empire collapsed. NATO, instead of going away, bowing out like the Warsaw Pact, morphed into a

larger imperial alliance, filling East European space all the way to the new Russian frontier. Legitimate concerns about the fate of ethnic Russians and border security are ignored in Brussels and Washington. The truth about Russia today is that when the old Soviet Union cried “uncle,” allied Intelligence couldn’t take “yes” for an answer. NATO is now posturing on the Russian border as if to contain the bear. If Europe could not, or would not, fight the Wehrmacht; it’s a safe bet the Russian Army has little to fear from Cold War poseurs in Brussels, Berlin, Paris, or Washington.

A new Cold War is, nevertheless, now curated in America and Europe. Alas, were allied Intelligence not so clueless, a non-Communist Russia today would make a better ally than either Communist China or a hostile theocratic *Ummah*.

China

Modern China is not so much an opportunity lost as it is an opportunity bought. Beijing is buying America at every turn; national debt, the NFL, the NBA, Silicon Valley, big box retail, Big Tech, US congressional staffers, and even the American President’s family are compromised now by the *Yuan* and commerce thriving under a globalist guidon. China’s avenues of influence are designed to win from within—win thru dependencies. Peking once cultivated myths about China as center of the universe. Chinese global centrality, alas, is no longer a fairy tale. Modern imperial China doesn’t need to conquer any government or country that it can purchase.

Capital Communist Imperialism is a unique 21st Century economic threat that invests to conquer. Beijing is now master of a new “guns and butter” metaphor. China is winning on many fronts today. Recent tepid alarms from the US Intelligence Community are more than a day late and more than a few *Yuan* short.

Indeed, the IC dropped the adjective “Communist” when speaking or writing about China, hoping we might not notice that Beijing is still a totalitarian ogre.

The *Ummah*

Just as you might be called a bigot to say Chinese “Communist” anymore, likewise we fear to call small wars in the Muslim World “Islamic,” as if religion had nothing to do with Muslim terror, imperial migration, or the global *jiḥād*. When you control the language, you control the argument.

Intelligence mandarins in the US insist that “we are not at war” with Islam. The small wars, or insurgency, fiction persists because Mujahedeen, Chechen, Palestinian, and Xinjiang Uygur jihadists, for example, are immunized by labels such as “oppressed,” “victim,” or “freedom fighter,” fictions fostered most recently by CIA Director John Brennan, leading apologist for all manner of Islamist atrocity, including the 9/11 sneak attack. Brennan tells America that Islamic *Jihad* is merely a “spiritual” struggle.

Chechens, we might point out, were dropped from the victim’s catalogue after two jihadists dropped off several bombs at the Boston marathon.

DIA Director, Michael Flynn was fired for suggesting that America is at “war” with Islam. General Flynn compounded truth with apostasy by claiming that America was losing the war with Islam.

As the Pentagon limps towards another half century of pyrrhic Islamic “insurgencies,” it’s hard not to be cynical about motives in the Intelligence Community and at the Defense Department. Think about it. The 9/11 Arab/Muslim air attack against New York may have been the best thing that ever happened to the surveillance (nee deep) state; unlimited funding to an unaccountable Intelligence Community and a similar windfall to a timid US Defense Department that doesn’t

have to win wars anymore. Today, correct rhetoric alone is enough to wish away all combat end dates or expectations of victory.

Little wonder then why E-Ring apparatchiks have come to think of perennial wars in the Muslim world as live-fire training. With such hubris, it's difficult to separate friendly from enemy body bags these days. If the truth were told, all American casualties in the *Ummah* should be attributed to "friendly fire."

Inertia is still the loudest voice in the national security community.

Global Mythology

Fake or ignored national security threats, apologetics, and bad policy fly in formation with a peculiar tail wind these days. Foreign policy now soars on global hot air, gaslighting.

The globalism charade is no different than the blather that lifts all Utopian fictions. If we just had open borders, less racism, more alliances, or enforceable global law; all would be right with the universe. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest that world government works; not the Roman Empire, not the Holy Roman Empire, not numerous Muslim empires, not the British empire, not the Third Reich, not the COMINTERN, not the United Nations, and surely not the Organization of Islamic States or the European Union. Alliances and treaties are merely punctuation marks in the march of history. Global Utopian schemes designed to cancel nation states, or borders, have always been pipe dreams. Utopia is a fiction not a future.

Nation states provide the security, grit, friction, and competition that make human progress possible. A global condominium would require, as Orwell suggests, absolute coercion and totalitarian force. Globalism is a clear and

present danger to both individual freedom and national sovereignty. Put to a universal vote, few independent thinkers or nations would choose global over national sovereignty.

The nation state model, warts and all, compared to the many failed alternatives, is still a necessary choice today. What would happen to Israel were it left to the tender mercies of the United Nations?

In the end, globalism is just another lame metaphor, gaslighting for a real, vice fictional, Animal Farm – another triumph of hope over experience. The political left admonishes us to “follow the science,” then ignores science that confirms inconvenient truths. Adam Smith, John Locke, Charles Darwin, and Thomas Jefferson, like Orwell, were prophets too. Life, liberty, property, and competition are the true guarantors of improvement, diversity, and progress among humans – and among nations.

This essay above is the preface to a work in progress that chronicles the devolution of American Intelligence in the past 50 years. Some of the material to be included in the forthcoming anthology appeared in formerly classified professional Intelligence journals, such as CIA's *Studies in Intelligence*.

[Table of Contents](#)

G. Murphy Donovan is a former senior USAF Intelligence Research Fellow at RAND corporation, Santa Monica.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)