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A Killer Dies, a Teacher Lives: George H.W. Bush v. Noam Chomsky



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A Humble Man Who Liked to Wear Socks

The obsequious praise of the life and legacy of the now deceased mad-dog killer George H. W. Bush (1924-2018) on the supposedly liberal and left cable networks CNN and MSNBC this last weekend was really something.

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Some of this historical ass-kissing was practically comedic. I heard the power-worshipping “presidential historian” and occasional plagiarist Doris Kearns-Goodwin fondly recall getting stuck in the Bush’s Kennebunkport toilet. Daddy Bush graciously broke the bathroom lock with a hammer and then told Kearns-Goodwin, “well, at least you write well.” A special memory!

Kearns-Goodwin also lovingly remembered that both Bush and her husband enjoyed “wearing socks.” On their feet? Who knew?

We saw a clip from the junior mad-dog killer George W. Bush⁴³ remembering that the senior Bush⁴¹ reached out and touched his hand after Dubya gave a speech at a memorial service in the wake of the 9/11 jetliner attacks. It was an act of “fatherly love” that Bush Junior could never forget.

MSNBC fake-progressive commentator and Obama fanatic Jonathan Alter praised Daddy Bush for writing nice personal notes to people – not nasty Tweets like a certain orange president today.

(Even Trump himself got some semi-praise for calling Bush⁴¹ “a wonderful guy who loved his family.” It was almost as if the networks expected Trump to call the departed ex-president “a “loser who hated his wife and children, with good reasons.”)

On CNN’s “State of the Union” yesterday, Colin Powell (head of the U.S. military Joint Chiefs of Staff under Bush⁴¹) recalled an episode from a family visit with George and Barbara Bush at the presidential retreat in Camp David. At one point in a rapid hike the president was leading through the campgrounds, Powell’s four-year-old grandson said “stop, I have to finish my ice-cream.” By Powell’s account, Bush said “well, alright then, let’s stop.”

“That’s the kind of man he was,” Powell elaborated, telling CNN’s Jake Tapper that Bush’s “humility” meant that the nation’s forty-first president didn’t want to take the personal credit he deserved for helping create a “new world order” based (in Powell’s words) on “peace and justice” and on democratic respect for other nations and multinational institutions.

No Victory Laps

The consensus across the board was that Bush⁴¹ was a prince of a man, a “true gentleman” who worked “across the aisle,” and who understood the need for “multi-lateral” global institutions – a proper globalist ruler unlike the petty and vicious white-nationalist “America First” cretin Donald Trump. (Don’t get me wrong: Trump is all that and more.)

MSNBC or maybe it was CNN (I get the two confused) brought on a Wilson Center expert to remind us that part of what made the senior Bush so wonderful was that he had previously been the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – as if the CIA wasn't one of the most evil, blood-drenched institutions in the long record of human malevolence.

As if Bush senior wasn't a blood-soaked, died-in-the-wool imperialist descended from the ruling-class heights of the military-industrial complex who offered this Mafia Don-like commentary on the meaning of the United States' slaughter of tens of thousands of defenseless Iraqi troops- a veritable "turkey shoot" by the accounts of direct participants – in the opening months of 1991: "The U.S. has a new credibility. What we say goes" (NBC News, February 2, 1991).

"What we say goes." How was that for faith in multilateral global democracy?

You thought the war criminal John McCain death trip was bad? Hold on to your seats for the Orwellian, history-liquidating death orgy of imperialist killer Bush41.

Particularly disturbing in an Orwellian way was the recurrent praise the cable news talking heads and their special experts effusively gave George Bush, Sr., for being "gracious" towards Russia and its last formally Marxist head-of-state Gorbachev after the supposedly glorious collapse of the USSR between 1989 and 1991. Bush41 was praised again and again for "not celebrating" the Soviet downfall and for being "respectful" in his demeanor towards the defeated Russian leadership. Bush senior carried himself with "profound dignity" by refusing to do "endzone dances" and to gloat – as we all know the Man-child Trump would have done in the same situation. In his conversation with Powell, Jake Tapper praised Bush41 for resisting the temptation to do "victory laps" over the fall of the Berlin Wall and the defeats of the Soviet Union and Saddam Hussein.

The Biggest Decline in Life Expectancy Ever Recorded in the Absence of Physical Catastrophe

I'll leave it to others with more stamina and a stronger stomach than I possess to compose a comprehensive left assessment of the senior George Bush's broad career. Here I just want to mention three key things missing from this "mainstream" media praise of Bush41's purported noble graciousness in the allegedly magnificent collapse of the USSR. First, the establishment media has predictably evaded the unpleasant fact that the fall of the Soviet state was a disaster for many millions of Russians and Eastern Europeans. The Russian and Eastern European people experienced epic, even catastrophic declines in living standards, health, and life expectancy thanks to the unraveling of state protections

and institutions. The end of the Cold War was anything but a welcome and liberating development from the perspective of vast multitudes. As the Dialogue of Civilization Research Institute in Berlin reported last June, the declines were worse than anything ever recorded during peacetime and without natural catastrophe:

The transition to the market economy and democracy in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union countries in the 1990s caused a dramatic increase in mortality, shortened life expectancy, and led to depopulation. In Eastern European countries (including East Germany), in most cases life expectancy fell by 2-3 years at the beginning of the 1990s; the most pronounced decline was observed for men in their 40s and 50s. In Russia, the steep upsurge in mortality and the decline in life expectancy were the biggest ever recorded anywhere in peacetime and in the absence of physical catastrophes, such as such as wars, plague, or famine.

No Fool

Second, of course Bush41 was outwardly courteous and genial towards the Russians. No fool, he knew very well that Russia – unlike the little countries he felt newly empowered to murderously invade (more on that below) – was still a nuclear superpower with a vast stock of atomic weapons. Bush had dedicated much of his adult ruling class and imperialist life to the undermining of the Soviet empire and system. But he was naturally respectful in public towards a Russian leadership he had helped convince to dismantle the Soviet regime. They were doing what he wanted them to do. Their willingness to do it was predicated in part on false promises he advanced that the U.S. would not push the Western military alliance further eastward. And he hardly wanted to spark a nationalist backlash and increase the risk of a potentially nuclear war by rubbing it in. (The real nationalist backlash came later and hatched the Vladimir Putin ascendancy under Clinton, Bush 43 and Obama44).

Unjust Cause (1989)

Third, as it is verboten to note in U.S. media, Bush used the end of the Cold War as a ripe moment for launching brazenly mass-murderous assaults on two defenseless nations: Panama and Iraq. These were the first two U.S. military attacks since the end of World War II that Washington was unable to justify in the name of its struggle against the supposed menace of Soviet-directed communist expansion.

The Bush41 administration and its CIA and military had to come up with new false pretexts for Washington's ongoing violence against the Third World. The Evil Empire could no longer be fabricated as the convenient and doctrinal excuse for Pentagon carnage.

When the Bush41 administration invaded Panama and forced regime change there in December of 1989 (“Operation Just Cause”), it concocted the notion that Panama’s formerly CIA-backed president Manuel Noriega was in league with malicious narcotraffickers hellbent on destroying the U.S. Other false pretexts included claims of U.S. concern over stolen elections, gangsterism, and dangers to U.S. civilian and military lives in Panama.

The real reasons were different: Noriega’s commitment to the U.S. proxy war against left-revolutionary Nicaragua was in sharp doubt and Washington wanted a more pliable government in power in Panama before administration of the strategic Panama Canal was handed over to the Panamanian government in January of 1990.

Along the way, it helped that the real if limited deterrent that the Soviet Union once posed to U.S. aggression was gone.

“Operation Just Cause” killed 3000 Panamanians by conservative estimates.

A Mafia-Like Whipping of the “Vietnam Syndrome”

The disappearance of the Soviet deterrent was especially critical to “Operation Desert Storm,” when Bush41 ordered the U.S. invasion of Iraq in January of 1991 to punish another one of Washington’s former clients, Saddam Hussein, for having invaded Kuwait in August of 1990. It was an action that most of the Arab world was willing to tolerate, unlike how Latin America’s response to the U.S. invasion for Panama. The Bush41 administration saw the Kuwait both as a threat to U.S. control of Middle Eastern oil and as a welcome opportunity to flex American muscles without fear of Soviet retaliation in the Middle East.

Hussein quickly realized he had made a giant mistake and made numerous efforts to negotiate a reasonable withdrawal, none of which were to Washington’s liking. “Evil Saddam’s” offers were ignored by the American establishment, including Bush, who organized and led a nominally “multinational” invasion that killed as many as 100,000 Iraqi troops and many thousands of Iraqi civilians.

For Bush41, the United States’ crushing defeat of Iraq was a chance to proclaim the supposed end of “the Vietnam Syndrome” (the unmentionably healthy reluctance of the U.S. public to support the commitment of U.S. troops to overseas wars) and to make a curious statement on the nature of the “New World Order” in the post-Cold War era. “What we say goes,” the respectful “gentleman” George H.W. Bush announced, exulting in the United States’ status as the world’s one and only Superpower, newly free to conquer and kill without deterrent threats from any other great state on the global stage.

The onetime New York City crime boss John Gambino couldn't have said it any better: what we say goes.

“Like Shooting Fish in a Barrel”

Among countless episodes of mass-murderous U.S. savagery in the Muslim world, one that I can never seem to forget occurred during Bush41's obscenely heralded “Gulf War.” I am referring to the epic carnage wreaked by the U.S. military on Iraq's notorious “Highway of Death,” where U.S. forces massacred tens of thousands of surrendered Iraqi troops retreating from Kuwait on February 26 and 27, 1991. The Lebanese-American journalist Joyce Chediak testified that:

“U.S. planes trapped the long convoys by disabling vehicles in the front, and at the rear, and then pounded the resulting traffic jams for hours. ‘It was like shooting fish in a barrel,’ said one U.S. pilot. On the sixty miles of coastal highway, Iraqi military units sit in gruesome repose, scorched skeletons of vehicles and men alike, black and awful under the sun...for 60 miles every vehicle was strafed or bombed, every windshield is shattered, every tank is burned, every truck is riddled with shell fragments. No survivors are known or likely.... ‘Even in Vietnam I didn't see anything like this. It's pathetic,’ said Major Bob Nugent, an Army intelligence officer...U.S. pilots took whatever bombs happened to be close to the flight deck, from cluster bombs to 500 pound bombs...U.S. forces continued to drop bombs on the convoys until all humans were killed. So many jets swarmed over the inland road that it created an aerial traffic jam, and combat air controllers feared midair collisions.... The victims were not offering resistance...it was simply a one-sided massacre of tens of thousands of people who had no ability to fight back or defend.” (Ramsey Clark et al., War Crimes: A Report on United States War Crimes Against Iraq to the Commission of Inquiry for the International War Crimes Tribunal, testimony of Joyce Chediak, emphasis added).

(A younger George H.W. Bush would probably have enjoyed direct participation in the “turkey shoot.” There are strong indications that, as a Navy pilot during World War II, Bush strafed two life boats containing survivors from a trawler that Bush's plane had just sunk in the South Pacific. That was a war crime under international military law.)

As Noam Chomsky noted in 1992, reflecting on U.S. efforts to maximize suffering in Vietnam by blocking economic and humanitarian assistance to a nation it had devastated: “No degree of cruelty is too great for Washington sadists. The educated classes know enough to look the other way.”

To make matter worse, Bush41 had encouraged Iraqi Shiites and Kurds to rise up in rebellion against Hussein when the invasion began. After disciplining “the butcher of Baghdad,” however, the U.S. saw no strategic reason to let these groups advance their power in Iraq and allowed Hussein to slaughter his ethnic and religion opponents with impunity.

“One Sole and Pre-eminent Power” in a World That “Trusts Us to Do What’s Right”

Less than a year after his forces gleefully carried out the “Highway of Death” massacre, Bush41 proclaimed that “A world once divided into two armed camps now recognizes one sole and pre-eminent power, the United States of America. And they regard this with no dread. For the world trusts us with power, and the world is right. They trust us to be fair and restrained. They trust us to be on the side of decency. They trust us to do what’s right” (emphasis added).

“One sole and pre-eminent power” in a world that “trust[s] us...to do what’s right.” How was that for the humble gentleman Bush’s commitment to a new world of multi-lateral democracy?

Might not Hitler have said something similar after having defeated the allies and putting Japan in its place after World War II?

Persona Non Grata: A Different Kind of Hero

You can read in-depth analyses of Bush41’s Panama and Iraq invasions in Deterring Democracy, Noam Chomsky’s magisterial 1991 history and critique of post-World War II U.S. imperial foreign policy, Published during the Bush41 administration, amidst the collapse of the Cold War, Chomsky’s stellar volume detailed how the U.S. was exploiting its new advantage to continue its longstanding projects of advancing its imperial ruling-class’s interests and destroying weaker nations with no fear of countervailing global big power – this while the people of Russia and Eastern Europe were being forced into epic economic misery and the world was being opened to new levels of global capitalist exploitation. It was just one of many volumes in which the trailblazing linguist Chomsky showed himself to be the United States’ and the world’s foremost public intellectual.

Curiously enough, the national and global treasure that is Noam Chomsky has long been a persona non grata in the supposed great free and independent media of the nation that claims to be the homeland and headquarters of world democracy. It is unthinkable that the chattering cable news skulls at CNN, MSNBC, or “P”BS would reach out to him for reflection on the Bush41 legacy and record – or on anything else of historical or contemporary significance.

Surprised? You shouldn't be. "There were some who found [the U.S. media's near-unanimous support for Bush41's invasion of Panama [in 1989] a bit too much," Chomsky wrote in Deterring Democracy. "Commenting on the Panama [invasion] coverage [in 1989], Chomsky noted, "David Nyhan of the Boston Globe described the media as 'a docile, not to say boot-licking lot, subsisting largely on occasional bones of access tossed into the press kennel.' "

Kearns-Goodwinian and Alter-esque boot-licking is nothing new in the press corps and the intellectual class.

Chomsky, who will turn 90 (still writing and giving interviews rich with deep knowledge and insight) in four days, is an intellectual and moral teacher and inspiration the likes of which one rarely encounters in the human record. In a remotely decent society possessing a genuinely open-minded and pro-democracy media, he would be a frequent, highly visible commentator on past and current history. His coming 90th birthday would be cause for public celebration and an opportunity for honest reflection on how we might learn from our past and present in ways that could help us overcome the intertwined forces of empire, inequality, and doctrinal thinking.

It speaks volumes about the power of propaganda and thought control in the United States' "corporate-managed democracy" (Alex Carey's phrase before it became Sheldon Wolin's phrase) that Chomsky has been publicly quarantined for decades by a "free" media that heaps undeserved and cringing, boot-licking praise on loathsome imperialist killers like John McCain and George H.W. Bush.

Let them celebrate the criminal life of George H.W. Bush if they must. It's who they are. Some of us lowly commoners out here in "the rabble" have different and better heroes. We prefer to raise a glass in toast to the continuing life and brilliance of Noam Chomsky