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The Washington Post's David Ignatius, a Leading Apologist



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The Washington Post's senior national security columnist, David Ignatius, is the mainstream media's leading apologist for the Central intelligence Agency, American foreign policy, and Israel. Last week, Ignatius described the politicization of U.S. intelligence by Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard. In the same column, however, he praised former acting CIA director John McLaughlin, who was responsible for the most costly intelligence failure in CIA's history—the phony intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction used to justify the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. McLaughlin's role in this debacle is public knowledge, but Ignatius chooses to ignore or forget.

Tulsi Gabbard, who is completely unqualified to serve as DNI, ordered the rewrite of an intelligence assessment to protect the lies of Donald Trump regarding Venezuela's connection to a terrorist gang, Tren de Aragua. Trump's lies were used to justify the

deportation of hundreds of migrants—including Kilmar Abrego Garcia—to a notorious jail in El Salvador. The government has admitted that Abrego Garcia was wrongfully deported. Gabbard not only stopped the intelligence assessment that exposed Trump's lies, but she summarily fired two leading intelligence officials who simply did their job, preparing an honest assessment.

Ignatius exposed the wrongful actions of the DNI and her top officials, but closed his column by citing remarks by McLaughlin, a leading supporter of the CIA's torture and abuse program as well as the officer in charge of the so-called "slam dunk" briefing. It was CIA director George Tenet who promised President George W. Bush that he could provide an assessment that would allow Bush to make a convincing case for war against Iraq to the American people. Tenet said it would be a "slam dunk" to prepare such a document. McLaughlin, who was described by Tenet as the "smartest man he ever met," was in charge of that effort and personally delivered the "slam dunk" briefing to the president

Nevertheless, Ignatius had the audacity to cite McLaughlin's advice to young intelligence analysts to "just keep doing your job professionally." The abiding rule, according to McLaughlin, was to "Be humble. Open your eyes. You don't know everything. Be explicit about what you know and what you don't know."

That is exactly what Tenet and McLaughlin didn't do in 2002-2003 when they politicized intelligence in order for Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and national security adviser Rice to browbeat their critics. With phony intelligence from the CIA, they began a war that took several thousand American lives, 37,000 American casualties, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilian fatalities at a cost of more than \$2 trillion. Twenty-two years later, U.S. troops remain in Iraq.

And it is exactly what CIA director Bill Casey and deputy director for intelligence Bob Gates didn't do when they made the phony case for an unnecessary military build up against an exaggerated Soviet threat. Casey and Gates made their politicized case in the mid-1980s; the Soviet Union were already politically and economically bankrupt at that time and collapsed not long after that.

And there is the example of former CIA director Mike Pompeo, who did his best to compromise any intelligence that failed to exaggerate the threat from Iran in order to challenge the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, more commonly known as the Iran nuclear agreement. One of his first acts as CIA director was to invoke the state secrets privilege to prevent CIA officers, such as Gina Haspel who was Pompeo's successor, from testifying in the trial of Bruce Jessen and James Mitchell. Jessen and Mitchell developed the

so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” that constituted the sadistic torture and abuse program. They earned \$80 million from the CIA for work that produced no useful intelligence whatsoever.

Ignatius over the years has been one of the worst examples of journalists who regularly report the self-serving comments of Defense Department and CIA officials tasked with shaping public perceptions of official policy. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the CIA leaked classified materials to reporters to create the false impression that its detention and interrogation program was an effective tool. In 2002, the New York Times agreed to withhold information about a secret prison in Thailand, where torture and abuse were applied, at the urging of CIA leaders and Vice President Cheney. And McLaughlin was permitted to contribute to a book of essays from CIA leaders who castigated the authoritative Senate report on CIA torture and abuse, and argued that they considered the “moral and ethical implications of a program that involved a degree of coercion.” The book received no scrutiny from CIA publications review, which regularly censors criticism of CIA from CIA authors.

Finally, Ignatius is a regular apologist for the Pentagon’s use of force and CIA’s covert action. For the past two years, he has regularly predicted victory for Ukraine because of the introduction of one Western weapons system or another. The most recent so-called “game changer” in the war, according to Ignatius, was the ATACM-300 long range missile system. He said the arrival of the ATACM “might eventually open the way for a just negotiated peace.”

As recently as May 25, the Washington Post’s lead article on its front page was titled “Experts: Time Ripe to Press Moscow.” A series of editorials in the Post have argued that “if Ukraine can deny Russia from reaching the borders of Donetsk between now and Christmas, and Kyiv’s international partners are diligent in degrading Russia’s economy, Moscow will face hard choices about the costs it is prepared to incur for continuing the war.” Well, if “ifs and buts were candy and nuts,” then every day would be Christmas.

For Ignatius, there is always light at the end of the tunnel in dealing with U.S. and Israeli militarism. In fact, in 2023 he wrote that the “thing about tunnels is that if you keep moving through them, darkness eventually gives way to light.” The ATACM was an example of Ignatius’ “light.” Before that, it was the Abrams and Leopold tanks from the United States and Germany. Russia President Vladimir Putin thus far has been willing to pay the strategic and economic costs of the war, which now finds Russia committing more than a third of its national budget to funding the war against Ukraine.

The most recent example of Ignatius's "light at the end of the tunnel" was the column that credited the United States and Israel with "making significant progress toward stabilizing three dangerous wars: Israel's tit-for-tat conflict with Iran, the devastating assault on Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the brutal war against Hamas in Gaza. For the past year, he has reported one hopeful scenario after another, ignoring the hostilities that continue and the thousands of Palestinians who face starvation.

It is a sad fact that over the course of the past 70 years, various administrations have received great support from the mainstream media in pursuing costly and unnecessary wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, which produced millions of civilians deaths and gained the United States very little. Reporters such as Drew Middleton, Joe Alsop, and David Ignatius have contributed heavily to this task.

Fortunately, individuals and institutions have stepped in to fill the void that the mainstream media has created. It was a whistleblower from the American Psychological Association who exposed the role of professional psychologists in creating a torture and abuse program. And it was the CIA's Inspector General's report on detention and renditions that forced the Bush administration to rein in the program. With the Trump administration, however, there are no inspectors general to probe for such transgressions, and it would take a very brave soul to be a whistleblower in our current environment.

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