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Republicans vs Democrats: Two Neoliberal War Parties With the same Economic and Foreign Policies

Par Gary Weglarz
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Perhaps it is time to step back a bit from the immediacy of this electoral moment to take in the broader picture. Emotional responses to the prospect of a Trump presidency may offer a needed level of catharsis for some, but they certainly won't help us understand how we got here. A couple of questions are in order. How is it that our two political parties engage in essentially the same economic and foreign policies, offering differentiation only in the realm of identity politics? What are the dynamics of mass psychology and propaganda that have made this reality invisible to so many for so long?

If we hope to understand what is happening politically in this country today we must look beyond the obvious surface level of events. We must examine how our perceptions, thoughts and behavior have been manipulated in ways most Americans are not consciously aware of. During the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barak Obama we have watched a continuous and rather exquisitely choreographed media dance between our two parties, brought to us, of course, by the corporations of our oligarchy.

If we allow corporate media to create the post-election narrative that is unfolding, we will remain as bewildered as we have been, all while surveying a dangerous strange new terrain. The propaganda machine of our duopoly has kept us blind for too long. Perhaps a little trip down memory lane can help.

If we look back on the eight-year presidency of Bill Clinton we cannot fail to recall the almost rabid hysterical non-stop attacks he suffered as the target of what appeared to be the total and complete hatred of the leading figures of the Republican Party. That Clinton was impeached related to a sex act in the White House made for wonderfully emotional political theatre. Who could resist? It was headline grabbing material around the globe.

Lost at the time was that his impeachment, and very vocal Republican opposition to his presidency, were quite unrelated to Clinton's actual policy decisions. Democratic politicians and many rank and file Democratic supporters rallied around Clinton in large part due to how continually under siege he was by these obviously vile and odious Republican forces.

So what do we make of the fact that an even cursory examination of the Clinton political record from that period makes the very public passion play of his two term presidency seem almost incomprehensible in retrospect? After all, Bill Clinton was essentially our first "Democratic" Republican President. He effectively continued and implemented the Bush I political agenda of neoliberal economic policies and imperialist foreign policy. From today's vantage point it is clear that Clinton was essentially a Republican president who had run for office as a Democrat.

Clinton pushed NAFTA through. He pushed through welfare reform. He pushed for and achieved much more punitive crime legislation. This included the infamous "three strikes" bill that helped make the private prison system complex, which he also supported, a shiny new investment opportunity for oligarchy. For good measure Bill Clinton deregulated Wall Street on his way out the door by jettisoning the Glass-Steagall Act.

Why all the Republican hatred?

What did Bill Clinton actually do policy-wise that ever betrayed Republican political values?

He certainly had earlier clearly proved his national security bonafides to the Republican establishment. Bill Clinton came to national political prominence out of nowhere, but only after having proved himself to the CIA and deep state actors of the Republican Reagan/Bush I administrations. He did this by playing a crucial part in the illegal and sordid Iran Contra operation. Bill Clinton performed a key role in that operation by warding off Arkansas State police investigations into the "drugs in / guns out" Republican White House and CIA operation that was being run out of the Mena, Arkansas airport. Without Governor Bill Clinton running interference Mena simply couldn't have functioned as the cocaine import hub in the government drugs for guns [Iran-Contra] operation. Quite a loyalty test, but one Bill passed with flying colors as evidenced by his rise from nowhere to the presidency.

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Editorial Feature

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The Mena Coverup
By MICAH MORRISON

MENA, Ark. - What do Bill Clinton and Oliver North have in common, along with the Arkansas State Police and the Central Intelligence Agency? All probably wish they had never heard of Mena.

President Clinton was asked at his Oct. 7 press conference about Mena, a small town and airport in the wilds of Western Arkansas. Sarah McClendon, a longtime Washington curmudgeon renowned for her off-the-wall questions, wove a query around the charge that a base in Mena was "set up by Oliver North and the CIA" in the 1980s and used to "bring in planeload after planeload of cocaine" for sale in the U.S., with the profits then used to buy weapons for the Contras. Was he told as Arkansas governor? she asked.

"No," the president replied, "they didn't tell me anything about it." The alleged events "were primarily a matter for federal jurisdiction. The state really had next to nothing to do with it. The local prosecutor did conduct an investigation based on what was in the jurisdiction of state law. The rest of it was under the jurisdiction of the United States Attorneys who were appointed successively by previous administrations. We had nothing - zero - to do with it."

It was Mr. Clinton's lengthiest remark on the murky affair since it surfaced nearly a decade ago, in the middle of his long tenure as governor of Arkansas. And while the president may be correct to suggest that Mena is an even bigger problem for previous Republican administrations, he was wrong on just about every other count. The state of Arkansas had plenty to do with Mena, and Mr. Clinton left many unanswered questions behind when he to Washington.

There are of course other implications to Clinton's role at Mena that are worth contemplating as we consider his place in history as a Democratic president. In simple ethical terms Bill Clinton shares direct responsibility, along with his predecessors Bush I and Ronald Reagan, for the many tons of cocaine that flooded US inner cities during the period.

Later as president, Clinton signed crime legislation which mandated expanded terms of incarceration that proved a huge boon to the private for-profit prison system he also championed. The victims in this scenario were those who resided in poor disenfranchised

communities, disproportionately African American, whose crime was simply to use the cocaine Clinton as Arkansas governor had ensured flooded US cities. The level of moral corruption inherent in this sequence of events is quite breathtaking. That American voters and corporate media have never come to honest terms with this history has only added another chapter in the untold story of the continuing moral corruption of our nation.

However, Clinton's "Republican" presidency did not end there. He continued both the sanctions and the bombing of Iraq initiated by his Republican predecessor Bush I. These actions resulted in the death of over a million civilians, including half a million children. Through Clinton's "Plan Colombia" he continued US support and funding for the military and government of a nation that defined the phrase: death squad democracy. His policies cost the lives of many thousands of civilians, labor organizers and those working in human rights and social justice organizations.

With our deep state establishment deciding to dismantle the last vestiges of socialism in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia became a target for destabilization and destruction. Continuing his service to the deep state Clinton was on board and dutifully did his part, including authorizing the NATO bombing campaign. The policy planners of the West saw the natural resources of Africa as suddenly up for grabs in the new post-Cold War world. There was a need to get the right people in power in Rwanda to ensure unfettered corporate access to precious metal and mineral resources in the region. Clinton was the man to paint a policy smiley face on the workings of empire by using the aftermath of the mass slaughter of civilians to create the new imperial mantra called "humanitarian intervention" or "responsibility to protect."

The oligarchs and the deep state loved this guy, and for good reason. What legitimate policy critique could the Republicans have? I mean really, what's a guy have to do to be made an "honorary Republican?" He is quite arguably the most effective Republican president since Nixon, though he is far to the right of the "Tricky" one in many policy areas.

So the question begging to be asked is, if Clinton was essentially carrying out the Republican agenda of Bush I, why was he so loudly and publicly hated and vilified by those same forces? The answer to that question requires that we explore and understand the media's role in "how" our two party / media nexus creates what becomes our shared political "reality."

Without those constant media attacks by Republicans, faithfully reported by the corporate media, rank and file Democrats would have had no reason to tolerate Clinton's total betrayal of what had been long standing Democratic Party policies and ideals going back to the New Deal. In other words, the vociferous Republican attacks related to Clinton's sexual behavior acted to "legitimize" Clinton in the minds of large swaths of Democratic and Independent voters who otherwise would have looked critically and actually been appalled at his traitorous policy decisions.

Without these loud and public Republican attacks Clinton would have been essentially an emperor with no clothes. The logic became, "well, if he is so roundly hated by the evil Republicans, he must be acting somehow in our best interests and therefore we must do our best to protect and defend him." I don't doubt that such "reasoning" occurred for many on a quite unconscious level. This is how propaganda operations work. Since the Republicans were obviously the enemy, the Democratic base was left with what appeared to be the only reasonable response, to embrace the old adage of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Clinton maintained credibility with his Democratic base because he was hated and constantly under attack by those whom Democrats knew were clearly the forces of darkness, those racist, homophobic, anti-choice, war-like Republicans.

If we fast forward to these final weeks of the eight- year Obama administration, we find, to quote Yogi Berra, that it's "déjà vu all over again." Obama's presidential acts have been unburdened by anything resembling fidelity to the campaign promises he made to his constituents. He has in fact continued Bush II's illegal wars in the Middle East, expanding them across the region in the process. He has presided over illegal coups in the Ukraine and Honduras, and, one could argue, also played a role in Brazil. In Libya, unleashing Hillary, he has destroyed a secular nation that had the highest standard of living in all of Africa. His decisions as commander in chief then sent the same jihadi terrorists used to destroy Libya off to Syria to continue their work in service to our rather transparently bi-partisan US foreign policy.

Obama declined to prosecute any of the Bush II war criminals, instead welcoming some to new homes in his administration. The comment "we tortured some folks" appears to be as close to justice and the rule of law as our Peace Prize president plans to get.

Obama pursued no prosecution of the amoral Wall Street financial criminals that destroyed the lives of millions of Americans. In fact many of these odious human beings made their way quickly into the Obama cabinet where they continue managing the economic system to the benefit of the same elites who financed Obama's rise to office.

Obama deported more illegal immigrants than any president in US history. He prosecuted more whistleblowers than any president in US history. He continued and may have expanded mass surveillance. He failed to restore habeas corpus. He is modernizing rather than reducing our nuclear arsenal, Peace Prize and promises be damned. He fracked, he drilled, and he effectively continued Bush II Republican policies under the name of a Democratic presidency.

What's not for Republicans to like? What's not for the oligarchy that owns and operates both parties to like? What significant policy decisions distinguish Obama as a member of the Democratic Party rather than a member of the Republican Party?

Yet the Republicans despise Obama, do they not? Ah yes, in no particular order: "Obama-care," "the birth certificate," and the "he's a closet Muslim" thing. Of course! How could we be so blind?

These attacks by the vile Republicans prove he is our benefactor and champion! Look how our enemies despise and hate him! So again the Democratic base defends Obama, right on cue, just as with Bill Clinton before him. Not because he is acting in their interests or living up to campaign promises. Instead, he is defended in large part because he is under unrelenting irrational public attack in the oligarch owned corporate media by the dreaded Republicans, which makes it appear that he must be standing up for us in some way shape or form yet to be determined.

These absurd Republican critiques of Obama have served the same propaganda function as the media circus surrounding the now legendary fellatio sessions of the Clinton presidency. They provide the illusion of legitimacy to a political candidate and party no longer deserving of the support of Democratic voters. While under the cover of this relentless Republican attack Obama has courageously and faithfully carried on the Bush II economic and foreign policy agenda in total betrayal of his supporters. "Since the Republicans hate him so much, he must somehow be acting valiantly on our collective behalf," or so the "truthiness," passing as logic, appears to go for many in the base.

Routine police murders of unarmed Black men continue to take place with deadly regularlity. The mentally ill are also shot and killed by police on a routine basis simply by virtue of being mentally ill, and therefore by definition unlikely to "follow police orders." In North Dakota police brutality aimed at Native American Dakota Access water protectors continues unabated, and screams for presidential intervention. One can only conclude that the evil Republicans have confined Obama to the White House and cut off his access to all media, denying him even the lame duck "bully pulpit." Such monsters! Know they no shame?

We have been had, folks. We have been bamboozled, conned, taken for a ride, manipulated and deceived. We have fallen, consciously or unconsciously, for the logic that the enemy of our enemy must indeed be our friend. Not so much, it would appear. At least if one considers the presidential policy record to contain any meaningful information worth assessing. If these decades of fake party fights to the death related to sex scandals and birth certificates, played to the hilt in the corporate media, aren't an actual CIA run operation, it should be. It smells of all the subtle media manipulation the CIA used in Europe to shape public thought and opinion during the Cold War. It has provided the only cover left for trying to hide the utter corruption of what amounts to two branches of a single neoliberal war party owned and operated by the oligarchy. Given the direct CIA connections of both the Bush and Clinton families, we have had 24 of the last 32 years of the presidency clearly in the hands of the deep state. The Bush family has been the Republican face of the CIA and the Clinton family the Democratic face. Had Hillary been elected the charade would have continued. Today all we are left with is the more and more desperate theater of the absurd attempts by corporate media to convince us we have political choices. We do not.

What has the Democratic base received in payment for its diligent defense against the irrational and absurd Republican critiques of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama? Quite simply, sixteen additional years of Republican policies on the domestic front and sixteen more years of deep state / Wall Street imperial foreign policy. If actual policy means more than rhetoric, Bill Clinton will be remembered as the first "Democratic" Republican president and Barack Obama will be seen as the first "Black Democratic" Republican president.

What was apparent to some of us at the time is hopefully clearer to more of us today. For the Democratic Party to effectively morph into its current form as simply one of two

neoliberal war parties has required constant contrived political theater validated and echoed non-stop by the corporate media. The vociferous, illogical and relentless attacks from the Republican Party against "liberal" Democratic presidents have acted as "cover" for the gutting of the Democratic Party itself. These attacks have served a propaganda function that has facilitated and helped conceal the Democratic party's betrayal of its own constituents, while promoting the lie that it is valiantly fighting against the depredations of the Republicans. It has been a decades long con job of the first order. This year's primary season and recent election pulled the curtain back to expose for the world to see the total amoral bankruptcy of both our parties and of our corporate media, all of which are owned by the oligarchy which rules us.

Meanwhile those of us who consider ourselves progressives, or, god forbid, radicals, have a good deal of soul searching to do in the wake of this election. Many "progressive" people have gone to bed each night over the last eight years thinking that they are ethical and decent people because they support gay marriage, freedom of choice and multi-cultural values. However, many of these same people lost no sleep due to concerns regarding the plight of those left behind by another eight years of brutal Democratically supported neoliberal economic policies. The "deplorables," to use the empathy-free language of the mass murderer who until last week was awaiting coronation as our nation's "first female Democratic" Republican president.

Charles de Gaulle's comment to an aide about how the American people would respond to the obvious State assassination of John Kennedy seems to describe the current mindset of many in the Democratic base regarding the corruption of their party and the role of the United States in continually fomenting global violence:

> "They don't want to know. They don't want to find out. They won't allow themselves to find out."

There is a rather grotesque schism in the psyche of many "progressive" Democrats today. Many ardent Obama and Hillary supporters, while acutely sensitive to identity politics in domestic issues, have ignored, rationalized or denied our ongoing imperial slaughter, directly and through proxy, of people of color across the planet. Regarding US military and economic violence in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America, Obama has enjoyed a free pass from the same people who rightly applaud him for his stand on gay marriage. Many have simply denied there is a problem and have not bothered to educate themselves about what their president and their country have been doing in the world. Ignorance can only foster the illusion of "bliss" for so long.

Denial is the most brittle of all psychological defense mechanisms. When denial finally breaks down it can feel as if one's world is crumbling, when in fact that world had crumbled long ago, its disappearance simply hidden from awareness by our refusal to look, to see, to acknowledge what was right before our eyes. Denial no longer works to protect us from the truth.

With the campaign of HRC the stage was set for not simply a continuation of the Obama regime but a return to the even more bizarre Dr. Strangelove neocon crazy of the Bush II years. One could already imagine the strategy that would be used to deflect from her "Republican" policies. It would be that the Republicans hate her "because she is a woman," so of course we must support her and her policies no matter what. No doubt a significant

portion of the Democratic base would have watched her incinerate the planet before they'd dare question her policies, her being the first woman president and all.

If anyone is still harboring thoughts that include the possibility of "fixing" this neoliberal dumpster fire that is the Democratic Party, there is really little more to say. First, the oligarchs aren't going to put their cash cow up for sale because it's too valuable to ensuring their interests. Second, the Democratic base is a bit too cash strapped given all those profits going to the top 1% to really make a competitive bid now anyway, isn't it? Accepting reality at this point means accepting that the Democratic Party of many people's fantasies or youth simply no longer exists. Period. Sorry, but the oligarchs aren't going to get out of the way and let folks do a radical makeover so they can lose money on the deal.

It appears we're going to have to actually work, sacrifice, organize, educate ourselves and each other, suffer, and resist, as hard and painful as all of that is going to be. The alternative is exactly what we've gotten for the last 24 years – a count down to oblivion during which we all watch Tweedledum and Tweedledee mud wrestle each other on our video screens, 24/7, while much of the world is left to hope, desperately, that we will finally collectively wake up.

Gary Weglarz recently retired from practice as a clinical social worker. He worked with, and learned from, Alaskan Native peoples who were attempting to heal the damage inflicted by the collective intergenerational trauma of colonization. Currently he is engaged in research and writing regarding the relationship between past mass trauma in Western societies, and the subsequent colonial violence that has characterized Europe and her colonies. He was actively involved in Central American solidarity efforts throughout the 1990's, traveling with human rights delegations to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Colombia. He currently lives in France.

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Articles Par : Gary Weglarz

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