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The Enemies of My Enemy May Be War Criminals

It's not every day that Republicans publish an [open letter](#) announcing that their presidential candidate is unfit for office. But lately this sort of thing has been [happening](#) more and more [frequently](#). The most recent example: we just [heard](#) from 50 representatives of the national security apparatus, men -- and a few women -- who served under Republican presidents from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush. All of them are very worried about Donald Trump.

They think we should be alerted to the fact that the Republican standard-bearer “lacks the character, values, and experience to be president.”

That's true of course, but it's also pretty rich, coming from this bunch. The letter's signers include, among others, the man who was Condoleezza Rice's [legal advisor](#) when she ran the National Security Council (John Bellinger III); one of George W. Bush's [CIA directors](#) who also ran the National Security Agency (Michael Hayden); a Bush administration [ambassador](#) to the United Nations and Iraq (John Negroponte); an [architect](#) of the neoconservative policy in the Middle East adopted by the Bush administration that led to the invasion of Iraq, who has since served as president of the World Bank (Robert Zoellick). In short, given the history of the “global war on terror,” this is your basic list of potential American war criminals.

Their letter continues, “He weakens U.S. moral authority as the leader of the free world.”

There’s a sentence that could use some unpacking.

What Is The “Free World”?

Let’s start with the last bit: “the leader of the free world.” That’s what journalists used to call the U.S. president, and occasionally the country as a whole, during the Cold War. Between the end of World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the “free world” included all the English-speaking countries outside Africa, along with western Europe, North America, some South American dictatorships, and nations like the Philippines that had a neocolonial relationship with the United States.

The U.S.S.R. led what, by this logic, was the *un-free* world, including the [Warsaw Pact](#) countries in eastern Europe, the “captive” Baltic nations of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, the People’s Republic of China (for part of the period), North Korea, and of course Cuba. Americans who grew up in these years knew that the people living behind the “

[Iron Curtain](#)

” were not free. We’d seen the bus ads and public service announcements on television requesting donations for

[Radio Free Europe](#)

, sometimes illustrated with

[footage](#)

of a pale adolescent man, his head crowned with chains.

I have absolutely no doubt that he and his eastern European countrymen were far from free. I do wonder, however, how free his counterparts in the American-backed Brazilian, Argentinian, Chilean, and Philippine dictatorships felt.

The two great adversaries, together with the countries in their spheres of influence, were often called the First and Second Worlds. Their rulers treated the rest of the planet -- the Third World -- as a chessboard across which they moved their proxy armies and onto which they sometimes

targeted their missiles. Some countries in the Third World refused to be pawns in the superpower game, and created a [non-aligned movement](#), which sought to thread a way between the [Scylla and Charybdis](#) of the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Among its founders were some of the great Third World nationalists: Sukarno of Indonesia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, along with Yugoslavia’s President Josip Broz Tito.

Other countries weren’t so lucky. When the United States took over from France the (unsuccessful) project of defeating Vietnam’s anti-colonial struggle, people in the U.S. were assured that the war that followed with its massive bombing, napalming, and Agent-Oranging of a peasant society represented the advance of freedom against the forces of communist enslavement. Central America also served as a Cold War battlefield, with Washington fighting proxy wars during the 1980s in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, where poor *campesinos* had insisted on being treated as human beings and were often brutally murdered for their trouble. In addition, the U.S. funded, trained, and armed a military dictatorship in Honduras, where John Negroponte -- one of the anti-Trump letter signers -- was the U.S. ambassador from 1981 to 1985.

The Soviet Union is, of course, long gone, but the “free world,” it seems, remains, and so American officials still sometimes refer to us as its leader -- an expression that only makes sense, of course, in the context of dual (and dueling) worlds. On a post-Soviet planet, however, it’s hard to know just what national or geographic configuration constitutes today’s “un-free world.” Is it (as Donald Trump might have it) everyone living under Arab or Muslim rule? Or could it be that amorphous phenomenon we call “terrorism” or “Islamic terrorism” that can sometimes reach into the “free world” and slaughter innocents as in [San Bernardino](#), California, [Orlando](#), Florida, or [Nice](#), France? Or could it be the old Soviet Union reincarnated in Vladimir Putin’s Russia or even a rising capitalist China still controlled by a Communist Party?

Faced with the loss of a primary antagonist and the confusion on our planet, George W. Bush was forced to downsize the perennial enemy of freedom from Reagan’s old “[evil empire](#)” (the Soviet Union) to three “rogue states,” Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, which in an address to

Congress he so memorably labeled the “

[axis of evil](#)

.” The first of these lies in near ruins; the second we’ve recently signed a nuclear treaty with; and the third seems incapable of even feeding its own population. Fortunately for the free world, the Bush administration also had some second-string enemies to draw on. In 2002, John Bolton, then an undersecretary of state (and later ambassador to the U.N.), added another group “beyond the axis of evil” -- Libya, Syria, and Cuba. Of the three, only Cuba is still a functioning nation.

And by the way, the 50 Republican national security stars who denounced Donald Trump in Cold War terms turn out to be in remarkably good company -- that of Donald Trump himself (who recently gave a speech [invoking](#) American Cold War practices as the basis for his future foreign policy).

“He Weakens U.S. Moral Authority...”

After its [twenty-first century wars](#), its “[black sites](#),” and [Guantánamo](#), among other developments of the age, it’s hard to imagine a much weaker “moral authority” than what’s presently left to the United States. First, we gave the world eight years of George W. Bush’s illegal invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as CIA torture sites, “enhanced interrogation techniques,” and a program of quite illegal

[global kidnappings](#)

of terror suspects (

[some of whom](#)

proved

[innocent](#)

of anything). Under President Obama, it seems we’ve traded enhanced interrogation techniques for an “enhanced” use of

[assassination by drone](#)

(again outside any “law” of war, other than the

[legal documents](#)

that the Justice Department has produced to justify such acts).

When Barack Obama took office in January 2009 his first [executive order](#) outlawed the CIA’s torture program and closed those black sites. It then looked as if the country’s moral fiber might be stiffening. But when it came to holding the torturers accountable, Obama

[insisted](#)

that the country should “look forward as opposed to looking backwards” and the Justice

Department

[declined to prosecute](#)

any of them. It's hard for a country to maintain its moral authority in the world when it refuses to exert that authority at home.

Two of the letter signers who are so concerned about Trump's effect on U.S. moral authority themselves played special roles in "weakening" U.S. moral authority through their involvement with the CIA torture program: John Bellinger III and Michael Hayden.

June 26th is the U.N.'s International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. To mark that day in 2003, President Bush issued a statement declaring, "Torture anywhere is an affront to human dignity everywhere. The United States is committed to the world-wide elimination of torture, and we are leading this fight by example."

The *Washington Post* [story](#) on the president's speech also carried a quote from Deputy White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan to the effect that all prisoners being held by the U.S. government were being treated "humanely." John Rizzo, who was then the CIA's deputy general counsel, called John Bellinger, Condoleezza Rice's legal counsel at the National Security Council, to express his concern about what both the president and McClellan had said.

The problem was that -- as Rizzo and his boss, CIA director George Tenet, well knew -- many detainees then held by the CIA were *not* being treated humanely. They were being tortured or mistreated in various ways. The CIA wanted to be sure that they still had White House backing and approval for their "enhanced interrogation" program, because they didn't want to be left holding the bag if the truth came out. They also wanted the White House to stop talking about the humane treatment of prisoners.

According to an internal CIA [memo](#), George Tenet convened a July 29, 2003, meeting in Condoleezza Rice's office to get the necessary reassurance that the CIA would be covered if the truth about torture came out. There, Bellinger reportedly apologized on behalf of the administration, explaining that the White House press secretary had "gone off script," mistakenly reverting to "old talking points." He also "undertook to [e]nsure that the White House press office ceases to make statements on the subject other than [to say] that the U.S. is complying with its obligations under U.S. law."

At that same meeting, Tenet's chief counsel, Scott Muller, passed out packets of printed PowerPoint slides detailing those enhanced interrogation techniques, including waterboarding, so that Bellinger and the others present, including Rice, would understand exactly what he was covering up.

So much for the "moral authority" of John Bellinger III.

As for Michael Hayden (who has held several offices in the national security apparatus), one of his signature acts as CIA Director was to approve in 2005 the destruction of videotapes of the agency's waterboarding sessions. In a [letter](#) to CIA employees, he wrote that the tapes were destroyed "only after it was determined they were no longer of intelligence value and not relevant to any internal, legislative, or judicial inquiries."

Of course destroying those tapes also meant that they'd never be available for any future legislative or judicial inquiry. The letter continued,

"Beyond their lack of intelligence value... the tapes posed a serious security risk. Were they ever to leak, they would permit identification of your CIA colleagues who had served in the program, exposing them and their families to retaliation from al-Qaeda and its sympathizers."

One has to wonder whether Hayden was more concerned with his CIA colleagues' "security" from al-Qaeda or from prosecution. In any case, he deprived the public -- and any hypothetical future prosecutor -- of crucial evidence of wrongdoing.

Hayden also perpetuated the [lie](#) that the Agency's first waterboarding victim, Abu Zubaydah -- waterboarded a staggering 83 times -- was a crucial al-Qaeda operative and had provided a quarter of all the information that the CIA gathered from human subjects about al-Qaeda. He was, in fact, never a member of al-Qaeda at all. In the 1980s, he ran a training camp in Afghanistan for the *mujahedin*, the force the U.S. supported against the Soviet occupation of that country; he was, that is, one of Ronald Reagan's "[freedom fighters](#)"

."

Bellinger later chimed in, keeping the Abu Zubaydah lie alive by arguing in 2007 on behalf of his boss Condoleezza Rice that Guantánamo should remain open. That prison, he said, “serves a very important purpose, to hold and detain individuals who are extremely dangerous [like] Abu Zubaydah, people who have been planners of 9/11.”

“He Appears to Lack Basic Knowledge About and Belief in the U.S. Constitution, U.S. Laws, and U.S. Institutions...”

That’s the next line of the open letter, and it’s certainly a fair assessment of Donald Trump. But it’s more than a little ironic that it was signed by Michael Hayden who, in addition to supporting CIA’s torture project, [oversaw](#) the National Security Agency’s post-9/11 secret surveillance program. Under that [program](#), the government recorded the phone, text, and Internet communications of an unknown number of people inside and outside of the United States -- all without warrants

Perhaps Hayden believes in the Constitution, but at best it’s a selective belief. There’s that pesky 4th Amendment, for example, which guarantees that

“[t]he right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

Nor does Hayden appear to believe in U.S. laws and institutions, at least when it comes to the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which established the secret courts that are supposed to issue exactly the sort of warrant Hayden’s program never requested.

John Negroponte is another of the signers who has a history of skirting U.S. laws and the congress that passes them. While ambassador to Honduras, he helped develop a [murderous](#) “*contra*” army, which the United States armed and trained to overthrow the government of neighboring Nicaragua. During those years, however, aid to the *contras*

was actually illegal under U.S. law. It was explicitly prohibited under the so-called [Boland Amendments](#) to various appropriations bills, but no matter. “National security” was at stake.

Speaking of the Constitution, it’s instructive to take a look at Article 6, which states in part that “all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land.” Such treaties include, for example, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand non-aggression pact (whose violation was the first charge brought against the Nazi officials tried at [Nuremberg](#)) and Article 51 of the U.N. charter, which permits military action only “if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.”

In 1998, Robert Zoellick, another of those 50 Republicans openly denouncing Trump, signed a [different letter](#) , which advocated abrogating those treaties. As an associate of the [Project for a New American Century](#) , he was among those who urged then-President Bill Clinton to direct “a full complement of diplomatic, political, and military efforts” to “remove Saddam Hussein from power.” This was to be just the first step in a larger campaign to create a *Pax Americana* in the Middle East. The letter specifically urged Clinton not to worry about getting a Security Council resolution, arguing that “American policy cannot continue to be crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN Security Council.”

“He Is Unable or Unwilling to Separate Truth From Falsehood...”

So says the letter, and that, too, offers a fair characterization of Trump, who has often [contended](#) that President Obama has never proved he was born in the U.S.A., and has more than once repeated the long-disproved legend that, during the 1899-1913 [Morro Rebellion](#) in the Philippines, General John J. Pershing used bullets dipped in pig’s blood to execute Muslim insurgents. (And that’s barely to scratch the surface of Donald Trump’s remarkable unwillingness to separate truth from falsehood.) What, then, about the truthfulness of the letter signers?

Clinton never bit on the PNAC proposal, but a few years later, George W. Bush did. And the

officials of his administration began their [campaign](#) of lies about Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction, [yellow cake uranium from Niger](#), and “smoking guns” that [might turn out](#) to be “mushroom clouds” (assumedly over American cities), all of which would provide the pretext for that administration’s illegal invasion of Iraq.

The Bush administration didn’t limit itself to lying to the American people. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Negroponte was dispatched to the Security Council to lie, too. Security Council Resolution 1441 was the last of several requiring Iraq to comply with weapons inspections by the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Some members of the Council, especially Russia and France, were hesitant to approve 1441, fearing that the U.S. might interpret it as a license to invade. So, in the discussions before the vote, Negroponte [assured](#) the Security Council that “this resolution contains no ‘hidden triggers’ and no ‘automaticity’ with respect to the use of force. If there is a further Iraqi breach, reported to the Council by UNMOVIC, the IAEA or a Member State, the matter will return to the Council for discussions.” The British ambassador used almost identical words to reassure the Council that, before attacking Iraq, the United States and Britain would seek its blessing.

That, of course, is hardly what happened. On February 24, 2003, Washington and London did bring a resolution for war to the Security Council. When it became apparent that two of its permanent members, France and Russia, would veto that resolution if it came to a vote, Bush (in consultation with British Prime Minister Tony Blair) decided to withdraw it. “We all agreed,” he wrote in his [memoir](#), that “the diplomatic track had reached its end.”

And so the U.S. was on its foreordained path to war and disaster in Iraq, the path that after much winding, much failure, and much destruction would lead to Donald Trump.

So much for keeping promises and separating “truth from falsehood.”

The Enemies of My Enemy

Keep in mind that this is just a taste of the CVs of this list of 50 Republican foreign policy and

national security luminaries who took out after The Donald.

With any luck, between his indirect [call](#) to assassinate his opponent and the latest [news](#) about his campaign director Paul Manafort’s shady Ukraine connections, we have now reached [Peak Trump](#).

With supporters bolting on all sides, it’s just possible that we won’t have Trump [to kick around](#) forever.

But we shouldn’t forget that the party that made Trump possible is also the home of the crooks, liars, and [war criminals](#) now eager to disown him. The enemies of our enemy are not our -- or the world’s -- friends.