

A bang not a whimper: Bush's Endgame Strategy

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Two of America's savants have uttered pronouncements about the final days of the presidency of George Walker Bush. In his magisterial statement succinctly titled, "Bush's Thousand Days," Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. pointed out that we have just crossed a significant date, for now less than one thousand days remain of the beleaguered Bush presidency. Schlesinger raises grave issues facing the deeply unpopular president. In his analysis of "The Passion of George W. Bush," Sidney Blumenthal dubbed this darkening period the "endgame." Taken together, these two essays present a disturbing image of a presidency in the throes of decline and desperation. These two essays urge us to consider the likelihood of a political collapse that could lead to disastrous consequences for America and Britain.

Blumenthal dissected the faded and now tattered dreams of the president and his *wunderkind*, Karl Rove. Gone with the wind is their vision of an Imperial America modelled on the pompous presidency of William McKinley, whose dream of the transcendence of American corporate monopolies and global military hegemony was thrown into the incinerator by FDR when he re-wrote the American social contract in the first one hundred days of the New Deal.

Yet, that aching nostalgia for an Imperial Presidency boldly governing a global American Empire did not die: it merely smouldered and rolled over in its grave, *nosferatu*, undead, unforgotten and lurking its next opportunity to sink its fangs into the jugular vein of destiny.

Under the darkness of the Vietnam nightmare, the Imperial Presidency revived and possessed the mind of Richard Nixon and his leading lieutenants, only to face the cruel dawn during Watergate, whereupon it crept back into its mouldy crypt, mounted its creaking catafalque and hid itself once again inside its dusty casket. This second un-death of the baroque vision of an American Empire in the Nixon era seared the minds and sealed the fates of its youngest and most ambitious protagonists: Dick Cheney, White House Chief of Staff under Ford, and Donald Rumsfeld, Ford's unruly Secretary of Defense. Like bereft twins of Frankenstein, these two true believers in the myth of the Imperial Presidency presided over the reinvigoration of its corpse yet again under the neoconservative ascendancy of Bush 43 in 2001.

Blumenthal recalled the now thrice-repeated rise and decline of American Imperialism. Along the way, he pointed out that the centrepiece of Bush and Rove's vision, the privatisation of social security, lies in ruins. The transfer of Social Security to the jaws of corporate capital would have sealed the fates of history and dissolved a New Deal triumph, rolling back the clock to the Gilded Age of unbridled *laissez faire* corporate capitalism along with the overt imperialism of the McKinley Era. Blumenthal made a number of other

penetrating observations before concluding that Bush remains an impassioned believer in the truth of his own version of destiny – a conviction elevated to the level of religious frenzy in a faith empowered by his certainty that the abject failure of his presidency is divine confirmation of both his political martyrdom and his own personal sanctity.

While Schlesinger's and Blumenthal's pronouncements about Bush are directly on target, let us now turn to the two courtiers who have recently entered stage right at the White House. The former Director of the Office of Management & Budget (OMB), Joshua Bolten, has been named Chief of Staff. Bolten has brought his top deputy, Joel Kaplan, with him in the newly created post of Director of Policy.

In this White House reshuffle, Andrew Card and Scott McLellan have been sacked, and Karl Rove has been demoted. Rove had been the *eminence grise* presiding over political operations and policy development for the Bush White House, but he had become vulnerable to indictment in the CIA leak case. Even though it is unlikely that Rove will ever serve any sentence – since Bush will surely pardon him and Scooter Libby as well as any others who face trial and indictment – Rove was stripped of his policy portfolio as a matter of political necessity. However, the first news reports explained that Rove was opposed to the next phase of the war on terror, Iran. This factor would not be surprising: Rove regularly reads the polls, and the majority of voters would not encourage any further expansions of what has become a deeply unpopular war on terror.

Rove's demotion opened up space for Bolten's protege. Bolten is now the key player in the Bush White House, who will be backed up by his trusty sidekick and top gun, Joel Kaplan. An appraisal of these two new players will provide a deeper context for Bush's final one thousand days, the endgame that will soon be unfolding in the some of the darkest days ever in American history.

When the little that is now known about the background of Josh Bolten and Joel Kaplan is examined, it turns out that they are slightly more than mere proteges of Karl Rove, as they were initially described. Josh Bolten's father is Seymour Bolten, who was a top ranking deputy to George Herbert Walker Bush during his brief, eleven-month tenure as Director (DCI) of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1976.

The two men worked closely together. Documents released through the FOIA revealed Bolten Sr's role in assisting Bush Sr. to probe a troubling problem for a previous DCI, Richard Helms. When embarrassing documents were published that proved Helms had deliberately misinformed the Warren Commission, Bolten Sr. advised Bush Sr. that Helms had lied to the Warren Commission when he told them that the CIA had never "contemplated" contacting Lee Harvey Oswald. Later documents proved that Helms was lying, and this scandal threatened to open one of the most malignant enigmas ever doomed to stalk the shadows of American history: the assassination of JFK, Lee Harvey Oswald and the CIA. This was a problem that Bush Sr. did not want to see return from the dead to haunt the CIA on his watch as DCI.

Bush Sr. instructed Bolten Sr. to analyze Helms's exposure to further legal problems and criminal charges that might arise from his false testimony to the Warren Commission. In doing so, Bolten Sr. concluded that the former DCI's predicament might cause him some public discomfort but no additional legal problems, i.e. no criminal charges. Helms had other legal problems involving lying under oath to a Senate Committee investigating the CIA. For these crimes, Helms would eventually receive the censure of Congress.

In this episode of CIA history, Bolten Sr. spelled out the Helms-Oswald case for Bush Sr., advising him that this deliberate misinformation might cause the disgraced DCI some grief but no criminal indictment. Had Helms been subject to the intensity of criminal probes into the JFK assassination and the CIA's plans *vis a vis* Oswald, it would have upset Bush, Sr.

In 1976, America staggered in the wake of Watergate and the loss of faith in its government. Much of this lack of faith centred on the US intelligence community and its major failure, the assassination of JFK. The House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) was being proposed to investigate the unresolved cases of JFK and Martin Luther King. Bush Sr. certainly had no interest in reopening that particular can of political dynamite. Bush Sr.'s involvement as a CIA asset in the Bay of Pigs and its aftermath, including the assassination of JFK, is the subject of hundreds of pages on the internet as well as a central theme in the bestselling book of 1991 when Mark Lane published *Plausible Denial* - and it shot to the top of the bestseller lists. Lane was the leading scholar of the JFK assassination, and his return to the bestseller lists during Bush Sr.'s run for re-election played no small part in the loss of public confidence that doomed his ill-fated presidency.

In 1976, the Helms problem had surfaced for Bush Sr. and Bolten Sr., when David Martin, a reporter with the Associated Press (AP), wrote a story based on CIA memos from 1960 documenting the fact that "the agency 'showed intelligence interest' in Oswald and 'discussed the laying on of interviews' with him." In a memo to Bush, Seymour Bolten stated, "This is another example where material provided to the press and public in response to an FOIA request is exploited mischievously and in distorted form to make the headlines."

Therefore, it is clear from the public record that, in addition to his personal allegiance to Karl Rove, Josh Bolten has a lengthy CIA pedigree through his deep family connection to the Bush dynasty that links him directly to the brief reign of Bush Sr. as DCI. That the relationship between Bolten's father and Bush Sr. involves the lies of Richard Helms about the CIA's "intelligence interest" in Lee Harvey Oswald has been documented for many years. Ultimately, Bush Sr.'s 'intelligence interest' in Oswald is another riddle wrapped in a mystery inside the enigma of JFK's assassination.

In recent publications about Josh Bolten, some fascinating facts have emerged. Bolten was Executive Director of Legal & Government Affairs for Goldman Sachs in London, where, according to *Pravda*, he, "supervised Likud legal affairs."

In his spare time, Bolten who is a confirmed aficionado of Harley Davidson, founded "Bikers for Bush." Jeff Birnbaum writing for the *Stanford Lawyer* reported, "Bolten rode a newly purchased bike to the Iowa Straw Poll in Ames. In honor of that trip, Rove only half in jest gave Bolten, who is Jewish, the biker handle "Bad Mitzvah." In the same article, we read, "For the last fifteen years, the man whom George W. Bush has nicknamed "Yosh" has spent most of his waking hours working for presidents named Bush." Birnbaum contributed another fascinating detail to the Bolten story that has inspired a considerable wave of Washington and Hollywood gossip:

"Bolten, who is unmarried, has made the gossip columns partly thanks to his bikes. News photographers caught him giving a ride on one of his bikes to actress Bo Derek, of 10 fame, during a Bikers for Bush rally in Flint, Michigan, in November 2000. Bolten and Derek had actually met earlier in the year at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia.

Derek, a die-hard Republican, was scheduled to give a speech during the proceedings, and she wanted to be briefed on Bush's policy ideas. "There were a lot of volunteers to handle this," recalled Bolten. "I took that task for myself." (The Stanford Lawyer, Number 69, Summer, 2004).

While he was Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Bolten became the world's leading crusader for Bush's privatization plans for Social Security. While explaining Bolten's importance for the Bush White House in 2003, Rove succinctly stated, "He's the explainer of all things Jewish to the White House." It is no secret that Bolten is a devout practitioner of his faith. Bush invited Bolten to open his first cabinet meeting with a prayer. Bolten complied with a prayer in Hebrew.

With a CIA pedigree and direct personal links to Likud, as well as Bush's sainted plan for the privatization of Social Security, there is little wonder why Bolten was chosen to replace Andrew Card. In their analysis of the recent changes at the White House, *Time* magazine has pointed to another interesting facet of Bolten's multifaceted agenda: the reinvigoration of the Republicans' waning credibility for national security. It seems that Bolten has developed a comprehensive plan to spin the currently dire political situation to reverse the fortunes of the president and to restore public confidence in his waning presidency. It is, thus, unsurprising that Iran plays a crucial role in Bolten's plan for an endgame. What is Bolten's plan for Iran? According to *Time*,

"This is the riskiest, and potentially most consequential, element of the plan, keyed to the vow by Iran to continue its nuclear program despite the opposition of several major world powers. Presidential advisers believe that by putting pressure on Iran, Bush may be able to rehabilitate himself on national security, a core strength that has been compromised by a discouraging outlook in Iraq. 'In the face of the Iranian menace, the Democrats will lose,' said a Republican frequently consulted by the White House." (Time Magazine, 1 May 2006).

The *Time* analysis basically parallels the reports of a nefarious "confidential document" said to be in circulation amongst senior Republicans suggesting that a new attack on the US by terrorists could return the party to popularity and "restore (Bush's) image as leader of the American people." *The sequence of events hoped for by the Republican hierarchy could involve a US bombardment of Iran swiftly followed by a pre-election terrorist atrocity. According to one report on the Republican memo, such a catastrophe could "keep the party from losing control of Congress in the 2006 midterm elections."*

This insidious memo may have been the source of remarks made by Bob Woodward during a lecture to an academic audience in Texas earlier this year. Reflecting on information gleaned from recent interviews with intelligence officials, Woodward warned his audience with a sobering thought: a forthcoming terrorist attack could relegate 9/11 to the status of a footnote in American history. Apparently, members of the Republican Party have been talking with intelligence officials about the consequences of terrorism on US soil, and they are already planning to make political gains out of future tragedies.

The political stakes are high. If the Republicans lose control of the House, John Conyers would become the Chairman of the powerful Judiciary Committee where he would wield the power to launch investigations into any of several potentially impeachable offenses. If the Republicans lose control of the Senate, Senator Ted Kennedy would become Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and he could launch public hearings into the scandals now swirling around of the Bush White House. Imagine: Ted Kennedy presiding over an official

investigation into Bush's clandestine eavesdropping, wiretapping and mail-openings aimed at US citizens or the torture cases of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. There are plenty of potentially explosive scandals, and the Republicans realize that they could face the political Apocalypse if they lose the midterm elections this November. Their fears are driving them to draft plans for a political Gotterdammerung of their own, replete with nuclear weapons and a president who has recently refused to remove the "nuclear option" from the negotiating table.

Josh Bolten's principal mission is to reconstruct political support for the Bush presidency by ramming through a program for a tough military onslaught against Iran based on its recalcitrance to abandon their nascent - and thus far perfectly legal - nuclear program. Frustratingly for Bolten, Bush, Cheney, Rice and Rumsfeld, Iran has not violated any treaties or international laws and - to make matters worse - a majority of the American people do not trust Bush to make the right decision "about whether we should go to war with Iran."

Be that as it may, Bolten has four months left to prepare the ground for an Autumn Surprise bombing of Iran to revive the fears of Americans and to herd them into a battle formation to support a renewal of "the war on terror". This role should suit him admirably, for Bolten was one of Washington's most vocal proponents of war against Iraq when he was in his old position at the OMB.

Now, let us turn to that other new arrival in the Bush White House, Joel Kaplan, who served as Bolten's deputy at the OMB. Kaplan went to Princeton and Yale. In 1988, he was involved in right-wing Democratic Party politics, but by 2000 he had morphed into a battle-hardened Republican apparatchik who accompanied John Bolton on the belligerent raid of Dade County election officials that brought the Florida recount to a screeching halt. This episode stopped the counting of ballots in the stillborn 'election', ultimately resulting in Supreme Court selection of and the assumption of power by the Bush-Cheney administration.

During the 1990s, Kaplan served four years in the Marines as a gunnery and artillery officer. As a Marine, he patrolled the US-Mexican border in a counter-narcotics operation. At Camp Pendleton, Kaplan trained Marines in the arts of artillery, logistics and the battlefield implementation of howitzer systems. At this date, history does not record whether Kaplan's military experience had anything to do with his political conversion from Democrat to Republican, but it would not be surprising if it had transformed his political identity.

Another credential that reveals his innate neo-conservatism: Kaplan did a stint as law clerk for the right-wing Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia.

At Kaplan's recent wedding in Texas, the pious Bolten read English translations of seven Jewish blessings, a courteous gesture for those in the party who were not fluent in Hebrew.

The tactical situation of the endgame is perfectly clear. Bolten and Kaplan are pedigreed right-wing intelligence and military operatives who will now enter the field to call and run the plays in the endgame of the Bush-Cheney administration. They will respond to input and orders from Bush, Cheney, Rice and Rumsfeld, but they will have a huge amount of independence, latitude and responsibility for the policies and operations that they set in motion.

While the forthcoming bombing campaign against Iran is frequently described as potentially

damaging to the security of the US, Iraq and America's allies in Europe, it is still generally seen to be in the security interests of Israel. I wonder about this, and I frankly doubt it, because a bombing campaign against Iran might trigger a retaliatory attack against Tel Aviv or Dimona or other targets in Israel. In fact, it seems much more likely that any bombing campaign against Iran will not succeed in strengthening the national security of Israel, but in weakening it. In Israel, there seems to be some popular unease with American policy in the region, particularly the war in Iraq and the threat of broadening the war into Iran.

The erstwhile British Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, represented the growing sentiment for peace in Israel. He made embarrassing public comments about the Bush administration's Iran plans, calling them "inconceivable" and "nuts." Reports that have appeared since his sacking confirm that he was removed from his office on the direct orders of George Bush who demanded that Tony Blair appoint a more pliable Foreign Minister. Blair complied with the appointment of Margaret Beckett, a person seen as incapable of challenging the authority of Washington.

Wouldn't it be ironic if the endgame scenario of Bolten and Kaplan involved the bombing of Iran and the concomitant terrorism of Israel? Yes, it would be ironic, but it would also be tragic. Even so, it is all too clear that the Bush presidency is swiftly moving toward a tragic denouement of Shakespearean proportions, and Bolten and Kaplan are destined to play out their pivotal roles in the tragedy against the backdrop of collapsing national security schemes for America, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the rest of the planet.

The vast majority of the global population does not support the Pentagon's plans for the bombardment of Iran. According to knowledgeable sources in Israel, Turkey has refused overtures from the US military that requested the use of the Incirlik airbase for the bombing of Iran. Meanwhile, further preparations are afoot in Iran itself. Maryam Rajavi, a leader of the People's Mujaheddin of Iran, is preparing for her role as the American favorite to succeed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president after the US-led attack precipitates what planners in Washington predict will become a massive revolt against the mullahs leading to a self-imposed regime change in Tehran.

Given the uncertainties taking hold of the international community in the runup to the US bombing campaign, the oil market is getting especially jittery. Formal speculations are now appearing in print that the price of Brent crude will soon soar to \$100 per barrel in advance of the bombing campaign itself. This will be yet another windfall for the major oil companies, many of which are based in Bush's home state of Texas.

In Washington, neoconservatives are looking forward to the next targets for American hegemony as set out in the documents of their most influential think tank, The Project for a New American Century. In Washington's neoconservative circles, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are seen as crucial targets for regime change. The strategic importance of these two ostensibly friendly Islamic nations stems from two factors: Wahabism, the fountainhead of the most militant forms of Islamic extremism, and their energy resources. While Pakistan does not have major energy resources, it is seen as a breeding ground for terror with nuclear bombs giving it dominance over the crucial central Asian oil deposits of Kazakhstan, the third largest untapped reserves in the world after Saudi Arabia and Iraq. A growing number of neoconservatives in Washington long for regime change in Saudi Arabia to ensure American domination of the region for at least another century.

In a recent interview with Robert Fisk of *The Independent* (London), Seymour Hersh insisted

that there are growing numbers of American generals who are strongly opposed to the Iran plans, but they are staying in the shadows where they can avoid the glare of publicity because they are afraid of becoming the victims of high profile character assassinations by Fox News, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

In his highly publicized lecture at Columbia University's school of journalism, Hersh lamented the, "collapse of Congress (and) the military." In his remarks to Fisk, Hersh criticized, "a Congress that can't articulate opposition." Hersh and his sources in the Pentagon believe that the showdown between Bush's America and Iran may soon be played out as an explosion of tragedy as Bush moves the pieces into position for his endgame strategy.

With every tick of the clock, more people are awakening to the fact that tragedy and horror are stalking America and Iran because this president wants to go out with a bang not a whimper.

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