

## The Other Side of John McCain

If the paeans to McCain by diverse political climbers seems detached from reality, it's because they reflect the elite view of U.S. military interventions as a chess game, with the millions killed by unprovoked aggression mere statistics, says Max Blumenthal.

By [Max Blumenthal](#)

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*As the Cold War entered its final act in 1985, journalist Helena Cobban participated in an academic conference at an upscale resort near Tucson, Arizona, on U.S.-Soviet interactions in the Middle East. When she attended what was listed as the "Gala Dinner with keynote speech", she quickly learned that the virtual theme of the evening was, "Adopt a Muj."*

"I remember mingling with all of these wealthy Republican women from the Phoenix suburbs and being asked, 'Have you adopted a muj?'" Cobban told me. "Each one had pledged money to sponsor a member of the Afghan mujahedin in the name of beating the communists. Some were even seated at the event next to their personal 'muj.'"

The keynote speaker of the evening, according to Cobban, was a hard-charging freshman member of Congress named John McCain.

During the Vietnam war, McCain had been captured by the North Vietnamese Army after being shot down on his way to bomb a civilian lightbulb factory. He spent two years in solitary confinement and underwent torture that left him with crippling injuries. McCain returned from the war with a deep, abiding loathing of his former captors, remarking as late as 2000,

"I hate the gooks. I will hate them as long as I live."

After he was criticized for the racist remark, McCain [refused](#) to apologize.

"I was referring to my prison guards," he said, "and I will continue to refer to them in language that might offend some people because of the beating and torture of my friends."

Image on the right: 'Hanoi Hilton' prison where McCain was tortured. (Wikimedia Commons)



McCain's visceral resentment informed his vocal support for the mujahedin as well as the right-wing contra death squads in Central America — any proxy group sworn to the destruction of communist governments.

So committed was McCain to the anti-communist cause that in the mid-1980s he had [joined](#) the advisory board of the United States Council for World Freedom, the American affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL). Geoffrey Stewart-Smith, a former leader of WACL's British chapter who had turned against the group in 1974, described the organization as "a collection of Nazis, fascists, anti-Semites, sellers of forgeries, vicious racialists, and corrupt self-seekers. It has evolved into an anti-Semitic international."

Joining McCain in the organization were notables such as Jaroslav Stetsko, the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator who helped oversee the extermination of 7,000 Jews in 1941; the brutal Argentinian former dictator Jorge Rafael Videla; and Guatemalan death squad leader Mario Sandoval Alarcon. Then-President Ronald Reagan honored the group for playing "a leadership role in drawing attention to the gallant struggle now being waged by the true freedom fighters of our day."

Being Lauded as a Hero

On the occasion of his death, McCain is being honored in much the same way — as a patriotic hero and freedom fighter for democracy. A stream of hagiographies is pouring forth from the Beltway press corps that he described as his true political base. Among McCain's most enthusiastic groupies is CNN's Jake Tapper, whom he chose as his personal stenographer for a 2000 trip to Vietnam. When the former CNN host Howard Kurtz asked Tapper in February, 2000,

"When you're on the [campaign] bus, do you make a conscious effort not to fall under the magical McCain spell?"

"Oh, you can't. You become like Patty Hearst when the SLA took her," Tapper [joked in reply](#).



But the late senator has also been treated to gratuitous tributes from an array of prominent liberals, from [George Soros](#) to his soft power-pushing client, Ken Roth, along with [three fellow directors](#) of Human Rights Watch and "democratic socialist" celebrity Alexandra

Ocasio-Cortez (image on the left), who [hailed](#) McCain as “an unparalleled example of human decency.” Rep. John Lewis, the favorite civil rights symbol of the Beltway political class, [weighed in](#) as well to memorialize McCain as a “warrior for peace.”

If the paeans to McCain by this diverse cast of political climbers and Davos denizens seemed detached from reality, that’s because they perfectly reflected the elite view of American military interventions as akin to a game of chess, and the millions of dead left in the wake of the West’s unprovoked aggression as mere statistics.

There were few figures in recent American life who dedicated themselves so personally to the perpetuation of war and empire as McCain. But in Washington, the most defining aspect of his career was studiously overlooked, or waved away as the trivial idiosyncrasy of a noble servant who nonetheless deserved everyone’s reverence.

McCain did not simply thunder for every major intervention of the post-Cold War era from the Senate floor, while pushing for sanctions and assorted campaigns of subterfuge on the side. He was uniquely ruthless when it came to advancing imperial goals, barnstorming from one conflict zone to another to personally recruit far-right fanatics as American proxies.

In Libya and Syria, he cultivated affiliates of Al Qaeda as allies, and in Ukraine, McCain courted actual, sig-heiling neo-Nazis.

While McCain’s Senate office functioned as a clubhouse for arms industry lobbyists and neocon operatives, his fascistic allies waged a campaign of human devastation that will continue until long after the flowers dry up on his grave.

American media may have sought to bury this legacy with the senator’s body, but it is what much of the outside world will remember him for.

‘They are Not al-Qaeda’

When a violent insurgency swept through Libya in 2011, McCain parachuted into the country to meet with leaders of the main insurgent outfit, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), battling the government of Moamar Gaddafi. His goal was to make kosher this band of hardline Islamists in the eyes of the Obama administration, which was considering a military intervention at the time.



McCain with Abdelhakim Belhaj, leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a former Al Qaeda affiliate.

What happened next is well documented, though it is scarcely discussed by a Washington political class that depended on the Benghazi charade to deflect from the real scandal of Libya's societal destruction. Gaddafi's motorcade was [attacked by NATO jets](#), enabling a band of LIFG fighters to capture him, [sodomize](#) him with a bayonet, then murder him and [leave his body to rot](#) in a butcher shop in Misrata while rebel fanboys snapped cellphone selfies of his fetid corpse.

A [slaughter of Black citizens](#) of Libya by the racist sectarian militias recruited by McCain immediately followed the killing of the pan-African leader. ISIS took over Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte while Belhaj's militia took control of Tripoli, and a war of the warlords began. Just as Gaddafi had [warned](#), the ruined country became a staging ground for migrant smugglers on the Mediterranean, fueling the rise of the far-right across Europe and enabling [the return of slavery](#) to Africa.

Many might describe Libya as a failed state, but it also represents a successful realization of the vision McCain and his allies have advanced on the global stage.

Following the NATO-orchestrated murder of Libya's leader, McCain [tweeted](#),

"Qaddafi on his way out, Bashar al Assad is next."

### McCain's Syrian Boondoggle

Like Libya, Syria had resisted aligning with the West and was suddenly confronted with a Salafi-jihadi insurgency armed by the CIA. Once again, McCain made it his personal duty to market Islamist insurgents to America as a cross between the Minutemen and the Freedom Riders of the civil rights era. To do so, he took under his wing a youthful DC-based Syria-American operative named Mouaz Moustafa who had been a consultant to the Libyan Transitional Council during the run-up to the NATO invasion.

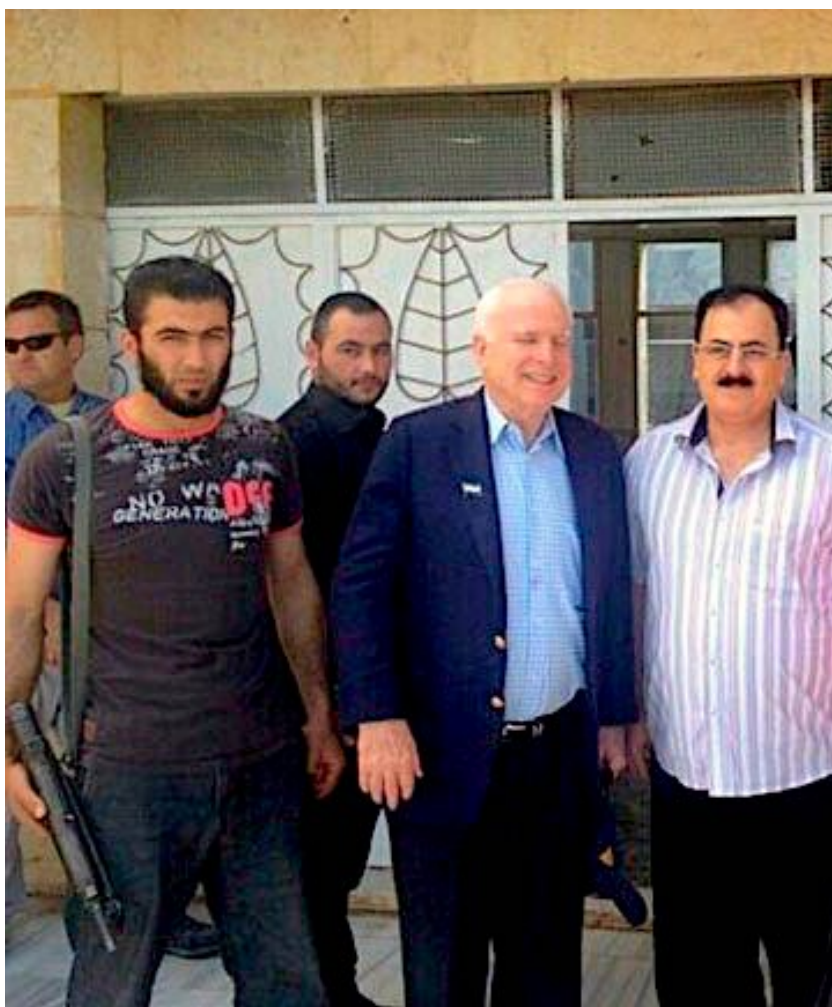
In May 2013, Moustafa convinced McCain to take an illegal trip across the Syrian border and meet some freedom fighters. An Israeli millionaire named Moti Kahana who coordinated

efforts between the Syrian opposition and the Israeli military through his NGO, Amaliah, [claimed](#) to have “financed the opposition group which took senator John McCain to visit war-torn Syria.”

“This could be like his Benghazi moment,” Moustafa remarked excitedly in a scene from a documentary, [“Red Lines,”](#) that depicted his efforts for regime change. “[McCain] went to Benghazi, he came back, we bombed.”

During his brief excursion into Syria, McCain [met with](#) a group of CIA-backed insurgents and blessed their struggle. “The senator wanted to assure the Free Syrian Army that the American people support their cry for freedom, support their revolution,” Moustafa said in an interview with CNN. McCain’s office promptly released a photo showing the senator posing beside a beaming Moustafa and two grim-looking gunmen.

Days later, the men were [named](#) by the Lebanese *Daily Star* as Mohammad Nour and Abu Ibrahim. Both had been implicated in the kidnapping a year prior of 11 Shia pilgrims, and were identified by one of the survivors. McCain and Moustafa returned to the U.S. the targets of [mockery from Daily Show host](#) John Stewart and the subject of harshly critical reports from across the media spectrum. At a town hall in Arizona, McCain was [berated](#) by constituents, including Jumana Hadid, a Syrian Christian woman who warned that the sectarian militants he had cozied up to threatened her community with genocide.



McCain with then-FSA commander Salam Idriss, right, and an insurgent, left, later exposed for kidnapping Shia pilgrims.

But McCain pressed ahead anyway. On Capitol Hill, he introduced another [shady young operative](#) into his interventionist theater. Named Elizabeth O’Bagy, she was a fellow at the Institute for the Study of War, an arms industry-funded think tank directed by Kimberly Kagan of the neoconservative Kagan clan. Behind the scenes, O’Bagy was consulting for Moustafa at his Syrian Emergency Task Force, a clear conflict of interest that her top Senate patron was well aware of. Before the Senate, McCain cited a *Wall Street Journal* editorial by O’Bagy to support his assessment of the Syrian rebels as predominately “moderate,” and potentially Western-friendly.

Days later, O’Bagy was [exposed](#) for faking her PhD in Arabic studies. As soon as the humiliated Kagan fired O’Bagy, the academic fraudster took another pass through the Beltway’s revolving door, striding into the halls of Congress as McCain’s newest foreign policy aide.

McCain ultimately failed to see the Islamist “revolutionaries” he glad handed take control of Damascus. Syria’s government held on thanks to help from his mortal enemies in Tehran and Moscow, but not before a billion dollar CIA arm-and-equip operation helped spawn one of the worst refugee crises in post-war history. Luckily for McCain, there were other intrigues seeking his attention, and new bands of fanatical rogues in need of his blessing. Months after his Syrian boondoggle, the ornery militarist turned his attention to Ukraine, then in the throes of an upheaval stimulated by U.S. and EU-funded soft power NGO’s.

#### Coddling the Neo-Nazis of Ukraine

On December 14, 2013, McCain materialized in Kiev for a [meeting with Oleh Tyanhbok](#), an unreconstructed fascist who had emerged as a top opposition leader. Tyanhbok had co-founded the fascist Social-National Party, a far-right political outfit that touted itself as the “last hope of the white race, of humankind as such.” No fan of Jews, he had [complained](#) that a “Muscovite-Jewish mafia” had taken control of his country, and had been photographed throwing up a sieg heil Nazi salute during a speech.

None of this apparently mattered to McCain. Nor did the scene of Right Sector neo-Nazis [filling up](#) Kiev’s Maidan Square while he appeared on stage to egg them on.

“Ukraine will make Europe better and Europe will make Ukraine better!” McCain proclaimed to cheering throngs while Tyanhbok stood by his side. The only issue that mattered to him at the time was the refusal of Ukraine’s elected president to sign a European Union austerity plan, opting instead for an economic deal with Moscow.

Image on the right: McCain met with Social-National Party co-founder Oleh Tyanhbok.



McCain was so committed to replacing an independent-minded government with a NATO vassal that he even mulled a military assault on Kiev. “I do not see a military option and that is tragic,” McCain lamented in an interview about the crisis. Fortunately for him, regime change arrived soon after his appearance on the Maidan, and Tyanhbok’s allies rushed in to fill the void.

By the end of the year, the Ukrainian military had become bogged down in a bloody trench war with pro-Russian, anti-coup separatists in the country’s east. A militia affiliated with the new government in Kiev called Dnipro-1 was [accused](#) by Amnesty International observers of blocking humanitarian aid into a separatist-held area, including food and clothing for the war torn population.

Six months later, McCain [appeared](#) at Dnipro-1’s training base alongside Sen.’s Tom Cotton and John Barasso.

“The people of my country are proud of your fight and your courage,” McCain told an assembly of soldiers from the militia.

When he completed his remarks, the fighters belted out a World War II-era salute made famous by Ukrainian Nazi collaborators:

“Glory to Ukraine!”

Today, far-right nationalists occupy key posts in Ukraine’s pro-Western government. The speaker of its parliament is [Andriy Parubiy](#), a co-founder with Tyanhbok of the Social-National Party and leader of the movement to honor World World Two-era Nazi collaborators like Stepan Bandera. On the cover of his 1998 manifesto, “View From The Right,” Parubiy appeared in a Nazi-style brown shirt with a pistol strapped to his waist. In June 2017, McCain and Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan [welcomed Parubiy](#) on Capitol Hill for what McCain called a “good meeting.” It was a shot in the arm for the fascist forces sweeping across Ukraine.

The past months in Ukraine have seen a [state sponsored](#) neo-Nazi militia called C14 carrying out a pogromist rampage against Ukraine’s Roma population, the country’s parliament erecting an [exhibition](#) honoring Nazi collaborators, and the Ukrainian military [formally approving](#) the pro-Nazi “Glory to Ukraine” greeting as its own official salute.

Ukraine is now the sick man of Europe, a perpetual aid case bogged down in an endless war in its east. In a testament to the country’s demise since its so-called “Revolution of Dignity,” the deeply unpopular President Petro Poroshenko has promised White House National Security Advisor John Bolton that his country — once a plentiful source of coal on par with Pennsylvania — will [now purchase coal](#) from the U.S. Once again, a regime change operation that generated a failing, fascistic state stands as one of McCain’s greatest triumphs.

McCain’s history conjures up memory of one of the most inflammatory statements by Sarah Palin, another cretinous fanatic he foisted onto the world stage. During a characteristically rambling stump speech in October 2008, Palin [accused](#) Barack Obama of “palling around with terrorists.” The line was dismissed as ridiculous and borderline slander, as it should

have been. But looking back at McCain's career, the accusation seems richly ironic.

By any objective standard, it was McCain who had palled around with terrorists, and who wrested as much resources as he could from the American taxpayer to maximize their mayhem. Here's hoping that the societies shattered by McCain's proxies will someday rest in peace.

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*Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of books including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement That Shattered the Party](#), [Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel](#), [The Fifty One Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza](#), and the forthcoming [The Management of Savagery](#), which will be published by Verso. He has also produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries including [Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie](#) and the newly released [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded the [GrayzoneProject.com](#) in 2015 and serves as its editor.*

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