

Elephants and Donkeys by Kathleen Klenetsky

The Mondale war on U.S. intelligence

In late September, President Reagan provoked a ruckus when he said that the failure of U.S. intelligence to foresee terrorist attacks, including the most recent assault on the U.S. embassy in Beirut, was largely due to the stripping of the CIA and related institutions during the Carter-Mondale years.

Although the President retracted his comment after howls of outrage from the likes of Sen. Daniel Moynihan, Walter Mondale, and Jimmy Carter himself, his accusation was right on target.

Under the Carter-Mondale administration, the war against U.S. intelligence which had been launched in the early 1970s reached its apex. Over a thousand CIA personnel, many representing factions opposed to the deals then being worked out between Moscow and Washington, were fired by CIA Director Stansfield Turner. Key operations were severely reduced or terminated, and drastic restrictions placed on the services in the name of "protecting civil liberties."

The case of David Aaron

One of the most important architects of this nasty operation was David Aaron, Mondale's top adviser on strategic policy and the man most likely to be named National Security Adviser in a Mondale administration.

Among other things, Aaron was personally implicated in the destruction of a key CIA operation in the Soviet Union—which may explain his crucial insider role in setting up the recent tête-à-tête between Andrei Gromyko and Mondale.

Aaron's involvement in the anti-CIA offensive dates to no later than 1974, when he was channeled from the Kissinger National Security Council to then-Senator Mondale's office.

Mondale, who had assumed a leading position on the Church Committee, placed Aaron as his point man on the panel.

On Aaron's counsel, Mondale led the battle to establish a new committee with extensive legislative and budgetary authority over intelligence agencies and broad investigative authority backed up by subpoena power. Where previously only a handful of trusted senators had been privy to the inner workings of the intelligence community, the Senate Intelligence Committee opened up U.S. intelligence to openly hostile senators.

In 1977, newly elected Vice-President Mondale took Aaron with him to the White House, getting him appointed to the number-two post at the National Security Council under Zbigniew Brzezinski. From this powerful position, Aaron helped engineer the Carter-Mondale-Turner purge of the intelligence community.

Doing the KGB's dirty work

In 1980, Aaron caused one of the biggest scandals of the period when he was accused of having blown the identity of a U.S. agent in the Soviet foreign ministry. Code-named Trigon, the agent worked in the Global Affairs Department, from which he channeled top-level intelligence to the United States from 1975 until the Soviets discovered him in the spring of 1977.

Trigon's last report to the CIA was the transcript of a cable from Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, describing an April 1977 breakfast meeting he had in Washington with Henry Kissinger, whom Aaron had worked for when Kissinger was National Security Adviser to President Nixon in the early 1970s.

Copies of this cable were circulated among top U.S. intelligence officials and the NSC. According to various published accounts, Aaron allegedly mentioned some details of the cable during a conversation with an East European diplomat, reportedly a Romanian, during an April 1977 dinner party at the Jordanian embassy in Washington.

The CIA launched an investigation and concluded, according to intelligence community sources, that Aaron had indeed been responsible for Trigon's disappearance. In 1980, the Senate Intelligence Committee opened its own inquiry into Aaron's role in the Trigon disappearance, but exonerated him completely.

This whitewash was to be expected, given the close relationship both Aaron and Mondale had with the Intelligence Committee. Indeed, the committee's chief staffer, William Miller, was an old friend of Aaron's.

Aaron makes no bones about the fact that he thinks the United States should accept a less-than-superpower status, a concept that dominates the Mondale campaign. In a recent interview Aaron gloated that "the American people aren't as clear as to what our role has to be in the world. . . . There is a pulling back . . . and much less willingness to be militantly engaged in world affairs. . . ."

With views like these, it is hardly surprising that Aaron should have found a job at the New York investment firm of Oppenheimer & Co., Inc., after the 1980 elections. Oppenheimer recently merged with Mercantile House Holdings. In January 1983, Sir John Buckley, the new chairman of Oppenheimer International Ltd., the London subsidiary which resulted from the merger, told the *New York Times*: "Our prime task is not just old-fashioned mergers and acquisitions. The whole capitalist economic system needs restructuring."