

Inside the CIA: An Interview with Douglas Valentine

By [Douglas Valentine](#), [Heidi Boghosian](#), and [Michael Steven Smith](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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In the following interview, Valentine reflects on a variety of issues including the Phoenix Program, plausible deniability, paramilitary wars, drug trafficking, sabotage, blackmail, propaganda, Operation GLADIO, class interests of the CIA establishment, Trump, the Mueller Report and the Bidens.

Heidi Boghosian: In 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act, which led to the formation of the National Security Council and, under its direction, the CIA. Its original mandate was to collect and analyze strategic information for use in war. Though shrouded in secrecy, many CIA activities such as covert military and cybersecurity operations have drawn considerable public scrutiny and criticism. In 1948, the Security Council approved a secret directive NSC 10.2, authorizing the CIA to carry out an array of covert operations. This essentially allowed the CIA to become a paramilitary organization.

Before he died, George F. Kennan, the diplomat and Cold War strategist who sponsored the directive, said that, “in light of latter history, it was the greatest mistake I ever made.” Since NSC 10.2 authorized violation of international law, it also established an official policy of lying to cover up the law breaking.

We speak today with Douglas Valentine, author of *The CIA as Organized Crime: How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World*. Mr. Valentine’s rare access to CIA officials has resulted in portions of his research materials being archived at the National Security Archive, Texas Tech University’s Vietnam Center and John Jay College. He has written three books on CIA operations, including the *Phoenix Program: America’s Use of Terror in Vietnam*, which documented the CIA’s elaborate system of population surveillance, control, entrapment, imprisonment, torture, and assassination in Vietnam. His new book describes how many of these practices remain operational today. Doug Valentine, welcome to *Law and Disorder*.

Douglas Valentine: Thank you very much for having me.

Heidi Boghosian: Doug, how did you come to get such unparalleled access to top level CIA agents, including director Bill Colby?

Douglas Valentine: Well, I’m not really sure of the answer. I was a nobody. I hadn’t gone to the Columbia Journalism School. In fact, I was a college dropout. I had written a book about my father and his experiences in World War II and I wanted to write a book about the Vietnam war. And so, I sent this book that I wrote about my father called the *Hotel Tacloban: The Explosive True Story of One American’s Journey to Hell in a Japanese POW Camp* to Colby. And he read it! And based on him reading this book I wrote about my father, he

agreed to do an interview with me about the CIA's Phoenix program.

But I really just stumbled into it. And I think that the reasons that Colby talked to me and then introduced me to a lot of other CIA officers are complex, and I think a lot of it has to do with the psychology of the country at the time. That was in 1984, and what was known as the generation gap. I'm not exactly sure why, but I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I just had the audacity to approach Colby and ask him to help me write a book about the Phoenix program, which nobody else had done at that time.

Michael Steven Smith: Doug, the book that you wrote, the *Phoenix Program: America's Use of Terror in Vietnam*, is considered by many the definitive study of the CIA's secretive counterinsurgency program during the war in Vietnam. One CIA officer named Lucien Conein called it "the greatest blackmail scheme ever invented." What do you think he meant by that?

Douglas Valentine: Well, it meant that the Phoenix program was targeted against civilians, the civilians who managed the insurgency in South Vietnam, not soldiers, not even guerrillas or terrorists. But these were civilians who were working undercover in political positions, generally speaking. We managed the insurgency in South Vietnam and their names could be put on blacklists. And once their name was on a list—once somebody had been informed about them, and once they were a member of a list that was called the Vietcong infrastructure, the insurgency—the CIA and its forces could go out and kidnap them, put them in interrogation centers, kill them along with their families, and do anything they wanted to try and suppress them. And the problem was that lots of innocent civilians got their names put on these blacklists. In fact, one of the ways that the CIA and its forces, the South Vietnamese Special Police and its mercenary army, one of the ways that they got people to inform on the members of the Vietcong insurgency was by threatening to put their names on blacklists. So therefore, it became a blackmail scheme.

So, if you were just an average citizen and you did not support the government of South Vietnam, you could find your name on a blacklist and your whole family could be wiped out. So, it became a way of not just attacking the members of this Vietcong infrastructure, but a way of population control, a way of terrorizing everybody in South Vietnam and bringing them all into line following government policies. And the minute you stepped out of line, you could find your name on a blacklist.

Michael Steven Smith: A common theme is the CIA's ability to deceive and propagandize the American public through its impenetrable government-sanctioned shield of official secrecy and plausible deniability. Can you give us some examples of this please, Doug?

Douglas Valentine: Plausible deniability? Well, first of all, one of the CIA officers that William Colby referred me to directly was a man named Tom Donahue, a veteran CIA officer. He had run the CIA's covert action branch in South Vietnam from 1964 to 1966 and later went on to join what was called the Vietnam Task Force. He was a very senior officer. Colby arranged for me to have an interview with him, and in that interview, Donahue told me that the CIA never launched a covert action program unless it met two criteria. The first was that it had to have some intelligence potential; it had to have some value to the CIA. And the second thing—it had to be deniable. The CIA does not launch any kind of program at all unless it's deniable. And it does this in a thousand different ways.

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deniable is by attributing it to another agency.

I spent hours talking to Donahue about all the different ways that they do it. But the most common way of the CIA launching a covert action program that is deniable is by attributing it to another agency; they say, the State Department is doing this; or they say the military is doing this; or they say a nongovernmental organization like Amnesty International is doing this; or they say another country is doing it. For example, they might say that the secret services of the government of Ukraine are conducting a particular operation when, actually, it's the CIA that's conducting the operation and controlling the Ukraine's security forces and paying their salaries and directing them where to go.

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So, there's just a million different ways that the CIA creates multiple deniability for it. And of course, every step of the way they have the help of the American media, which is in a partnership with the CIA, the major newspapers and TV organizations, every report about the CIA. And you know, we're supposed to live in a democracy, and the media—especially investigative reporters—are supposed to be out there looking out for our interests and telling us what's really happening. But of course, they don't do that. And what's really happening, the most important things that are happening and shaping our democracy are the CIA's covert actions, which are all deniable and never reported on. So, mere civilians in the United States really never know what's going on.

Heidi Boghosian: Doug, in your book, *The CIA as Organized Crime: How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World*, you lay out some of the most egregious acts of the agency. What do you think are one or two of the worst?

Douglas Valentine: Oh, you know, that's so hard to say, but it's certainly conducting paramilitary wars in foreign countries. For example, in Laos, the CIA organized an entire army of mountain tribes. They were mistakenly called the Meo by the Americans [pronounced Mayo] (which was equivalent to saying the N-word), when they were actually the Hmong [pronounced Mung].

Laos was supposed to be a country that was neutral, but the CIA organized an entire secret army of just this tribe of Hmong natives. Most of the soldiers were children, young boys, 14, 15, 16 years old. And they sent thousands and thousands of these young boys to their deaths trying to stop the Vietcong from coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos. They just used this mountain tribe as expendable cannon fodder. And they do this sort of thing all over the world all the time. They've done it in Iraq, they've done it in Afghanistan, they do it in numerous countries throughout Africa, where they just organize militias and secret armies.

And nobody ever reports how tens of thousands of these people [are sent] to their deaths. There's never a price to pay for it. So, for me—of all of the many, many things they do, including torture as blackmail, even infiltrating various agencies—you have the U.S. government using them for its own purposes, conducting secret wars and sacrificing young foreign citizens. That really strikes me as the worst.

Heidi Boghosian: How does the CIA dominate branches of the U.S. government, like the Drug

Enforcement Administration and the State Department?

Douglas Valentine: Under what's called *national security*—that little security law, you know—there is a clause that was included in the National Security Directive of December 19, 1947, which gives the CIA the right—for the president to direct the CIA to do whatever is necessary in the interests of national security. Therefore, they can infiltrate any agency of the government and assign office positions in that agency—for example, the Drug Enforcement Administration—to CIA officers so that CIA officers could make sure that the foreign operations that the DEA is conducting, or the foreign operations that U.S. Customs or even the FBI, certainly the military, are conducting, are not infiltrated by foreign agents—or in case of the DEA—that actual drug traffickers that are working for the CIA aren't arrested, and allows the CIA to control the drug business around the world, which is really important for the United States, and has been since before the CIA was created, when the United States was supporting the nationalist Chinese in China in the 1930s, the way the nationalist Chinese supported themselves was through opium revenues.



President Harry S. Truman signs the National Security Act of 1947, which created the Central Intelligence Agency.

Truman later wrote: "I never would have agreed to the formulation of the Central Intelligence Agency back in forty-seven, if I had known it would become the American Gestapo." [Credit: Wikimedia.com]

And so, the United States government allowed Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang government to traffic narcotics so they could support themselves. And you know, the United States government does that with various governments around the world even today, such as in Afghanistan, where the people who support the United States and its operations against the Taliban are often drug trafficking warlords—who again, in exchange for lucrative contracts, contracting contracts, the right to build airports or construction contracts, ante up young soldiers and, in return, you know, are sent to their deaths by the scores, by the hundreds, by the thousands. In exchange, these warlords are allowed to traffic narcotics. That's basically how the CIA does business around the world. And it's not just through the DEA, but through nearly every United States agency that operates overseas. They all are

subservient to the CIA—the CIA has what's called cognizance over their operations and, basically, complete control.

Michael Steven Smith: Doug, what influence has the CIA's activities had on social and political movements abroad and in the United States?

Basically, the essence of [the CIA's] mandate is to—through sabotage and propaganda—control political and social movements in foreign countries...It's been standard practice and...the driving principle since after World War II.

Douglas Valentine: Sure. This is one of the primary covert operations of the CIA. Basically, the essence of its mandate is to—through sabotage and propaganda—control political and social movements in foreign countries. And they do this set up for a variety of ways. It's been standard practice and sort of the driving principle since after World War II.

If I can just give a little background. After World War II, the communists had really formed the underground forces of resistance against the Nazis in France and Italy and in a couple of other European nations. And so immediately after World War II, communist parties became politically influential—and I'll just focus on France and Italy—and they, all of a sudden, were in control of the governments. But the CIA could not fight wars against France and Italy. So, they developed a program called "courting the compatible left." In order to get France and Italy away from communism, they supported the Social Democrats, people who weren't hardcore communists, but people who were willing to work with capitalism, accept American aid and work with the Americans. And so, the CIA resorted to very subtle ways of luring hardcore communists away from communism into its social democratic movement. And this began to bloom and blossom all across the world as a standard operating procedure. When the communists were intractable, then they would do such things as hire Corsican gangsters, which they did in Marseille right after World War II to break up communist strikes.



Sicilian Mafia leaders [Credit: pininterest.ca]

But, generally speaking, they tried to do this through subtle forms of propaganda, blackmail, bribery, sabotage and methods like that. There's a pretty good book about that...[[The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters](#) by Frances Stonor Saunders]...It's about how the CIA waged cultural war in the 1950s and 1960s that a lot of Americans played, people like Gloria Steinem and other intellectuals in the United States, who actually helped the CIA in this effort to lure people out of the Communist Party into a social democratic movement.

Heidi Boghosian: Doug, let's talk about the class origins of the CIA. Who does it really represent in the United States of America? Is it the establishment?

Douglas Valentine: Well, certainly the CIA is not a social services organization. Its mandate

does not state that it should help poor people in the United States. It's mandated to protect the national security of the United States. And by definition, that means the people who actually own the industrial infrastructure, the banking system...the individuals who own the United States, the millionaires and billionaires. The people who through big corporations employ many thousands of Americans. That's what's meant by national security: supporting those corporations and the people that actually are the Wall Street investment bankers, that faction of the United States. And when the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the predecessor of the CIA—was formed in 1942 by President Roosevelt, the person he went to was a man named William Donovan, who had been a World War I veteran and was a U.S. attorney in Buffalo and elsewhere.

And Donovan went to all the elite people from the Ivy League colleges, from industry, and those individuals were all given the management positions in the OSS. And when the CIA was created, all those people from the upper crust—the OSS was often called the *Oh So Social*—it was the Foxtrot crowd from Georgetown. All those people went in and took over all the management positions. That does not mean that the CIA does not hire people from all ethnicities...[they hired] translators who speak unusual languages...somebody from Jacksonville, Florida, who plays football or some guy from Texas who's a football player...[that does not mean they] can't get into the CIA and into its paramilitary division.

What it means is that all the important decisions that all the management in the executive positions are filled by people from the upper class and they know perfectly well that the job is to protect the interests of the major corporations and banking institutions. And like I said, the people who actually own America, that's what national security is.

Heidi Boghosian: And what is the CIA's relationship with Trump? Is it independent from him?

Douglas Valentine: Well, I don't exactly know. It's been theorized that when Trump was in financial trouble, and that he needed an influx of capital, he went to Deutsche Bank and massive loans were forthcoming to him. The CIA may have had some hand in that; that the money that was coming to him was from Russian oligarchs who were basically mafia characters in the Soviet Union, that had just collapsed. And the CIA wanted to, again, control political and social movements. Like, in Russia, [the CIA] gravitated towards the wealthiest people and it tried to establish wealthy people in Russia who were beholden to it. The CIA and United States government may have arranged for some of these Russian oligarchs to launder their ill-gotten money to Donald Trump through Deutsche Bank. Trump being a greedy guy, who never thinks beyond the minute, may have been unwitting as to the source of where this money was coming from.

Somebody might've said to him, "Donald, why don't you go to Deutsche Bank? I think you can get a deal there," and just being a greedy guy who lives in the moment, he did it and the money was forthcoming and so he could have been an unwitting recipient of dirty money. That's a theory that's floating around. And if it's true, then the Mueller investigation or any other kind of investigation that was ever launched in the United States would never reveal it because no investigation is ever allowed to reveal the CIA's hand.

[S]ecrecy dominates our society; secrecy dominates our culture. It dominates the world and especially it dominates us through the secret of how we're dominated and none of that is ever revealed. And if it was to be revealed, and we were all to understand how the CIA operates and how it actually controls the information that we receive, then there would be a total upheaval in

American society.

So, in a sense, Trump would be a protected person forever. If anybody read the Mueller report, you'll see that the CIA is never mentioned. There's a reason for that. You know, these things come to us. People say that, you know, Attorney General William Barr scripted it or somebody else scripted it, but you just never read about it. You don't read about the CIA in the *New York Times* either. I mean you just don't read about it. And it's because secrecy dominates our society; secrecy dominates our culture. It dominates the world and especially it dominates us through the secret of how we're dominated and none of that is ever revealed. And if it was to be revealed, and we were all to understand how the CIA operates and how it actually controls the information that we receive, then there would be a total upheaval in American society. It just never happens.

Michael Steven Smith: Okay. We're coming to the end of our allotted time, Doug Valentine. But before we let you go, there is a story breaking now that Heidi and I have been discussing about Joe Biden and his son, Hunter Biden, and Trump trying to get Hunter Biden investigated for his position on an energy corporation in the Ukraine. And that's led to a call for impeachment and investigation. What's your take on this story as it's unfolding?

Douglas Valentine: Well, I actually mentioned Hunter in a passage in my book *The CIA as Organized Crime: How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World*. And you know, Hunter Biden was certainly not the only American to prosper as a result of 20 years of CIA covert operations to pull Ukraine away from the Russian orbit. And once that happened, hundreds of American business people just poured into Ukraine and assumed positions in many corporations. [U.S.-born Natalie] Jaresko....the day that she obtained Ukraine citizenship, she became head of the Ukraine Treasury Department. No, I mean, and this is not America! So, if you started investigating Hunter Biden, then you've got to investigate a hundred or a thousand other American business people and political figures who are what I call in my books super-predators who basically operate the way the Mafia does.

You know, they take over governments by twenty years of CIA subversion; blackmailing people and countries, setting them up, overloading them with loans from the IMF or something like that. And then when they can't pay off their loans, they swoop in like vultures and take over their country and they take over their corporations. And so, what Hunter Biden did, and what I stress in my book: This is just business as usual. The only value it has is, in this war of words that's being waged between the Republicans and the Democrats, nothing of the CIA's involvement in setting up these kinds of takeovers in foreign countries is ever, ever going to be revealed.

[W]e're subjected to the spectacle of Republicans and Democrats smearing each other, [with] the investigative reporters never getting to the root cause...that America is an imperial nation that is subverting and overtaking foreign governments on a daily basis around the world.

We have this sort of stasis, between the Republicans and the Democrats, where we're subjected to the spectacle of Republicans and Democrats smearing each other, [with] the investigative reporters never getting to the root cause of all this: namely, the fact that America is an imperial nation that is subverting and overtaking foreign governments on a daily basis around the world. And so, we are subjected to this spectacle and that's all we ever see. And the powers that be are perfectly happy for us to be enthralled by this, what I

call the anvil chorus: one side hammering the other with smear tactics, ad infinitum. And in the meantime, nobody ever really knows what's going on because everything that's really important is secret and covered up.

Heidi Boghosian: Doug. Unfortunately, we have come to the end of our time. How can listeners read more about what you've done and your body of work on the CIA is really magnificent? Do you have a website?

Douglas Valentine: Yes, I do. You can go to douglasvalentine.com which lists all my books. Plus, if you go to Google and you punch in my name, I am usually the first Doug Valentine that comes up. Google has all my books listed and at this point there's like seven or eight of them—I can't remember anymore.

Heidi Boghosian: Thank you so much for being on with us today and we hope to stay in touch as future political developments unravel.

Douglas Valentine: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity.

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Douglas Valentine is an investigator and author with a rare and tenacious approach toward research. His writing results in uniquely incisive and revealing books on the dark side of U.S. intelligence activities and the National Security State. His latest book, [The CIA as Organized Crime: How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World](#), draws parallels between CIA operations in Vietnam—as exposed in his well-known 1990 book, [The Phoenix Program: America's Use of Terror in Vietnam](#)—and recent/current operations in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere.

Heidi Boghosian, a lawyer, is the executive director of the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute. Previously she was the executive director of the National Lawyers Guild, a progressive bar association established in 1937, where she oversaw the legal defense of people targeted by government. She co-hosts the weekly civil liberties radio show Law and Disorder with Michael Steven Smith, that airs on Pacifica Radio's WBAI, New York, and is broadcast on more than 100 other stations.

Michael Steven Smith is an author, speaker, and New York City attorney with the firm Michael Steven Smith and Associates. His firm has for twenty years successfully represented victims in suits against insurance companies in cases of medical malpractice and other accidents. He has authored or edited five books including Notebook of a Sixties Lawyer: An Unrepentant Memoir and Selected Writings, Lawyers You'll Like: Putting Human Rights First, and Che Guevara and the FBI (with Michael Ratner).

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