

Opinion

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The whole truth . . . ?

By staging a "disinformation campaign" against Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, the White House not only manipulated the media and the American people to implement foreign policy, it violated the public's right to know the truth.

The *Washington Post* reported Thursday that the White House launched a disinformation program with the basic goal of making Gadhafi think there was a high degree of internal opposition against him in Libya, that his key aides were disloyal, and that the United States was about to move against him militarily.

The campaign was confirmed by administration officials and a three-page memorandum to President Reagan from John M. Poin-dexter, the president's national security adviser. Reagan admits that U.S. intelligence had been monitoring Gadhafi's activities but denied deceiving the public.

Secretary of State George Shultz disputes the seriousness of spreading "disinformation," saying that if he were a private citizen and read about an attempt by the government to confuse terrorists, he would "hope it's true."

But if Shultz were a private citizen who read about a government attempt to spread false information about anything, he would then have no way of knowing when his government was telling the truth.

Shultz's approval of deceiving the American public to instigate foreign policy is deplorable, but not out of line with previous administration attitudes. As early as 1982, the Reagan administration attempted to show that the United States is at a disadvantage with the Soviet Union because the Soviets have no qualms about spreading lies through its media.

This is one case where the United States cannot stoop to the Soviets' level in a tit-for-tat exchange. Americans value their access to information, and our government should also. An enlightened public is the forerunner of justice.

The administration's actions show no regard for this form of justice. Instead it has made a mockery of this notion in the name of questionable foreign policy techniques.

Monitoring Gadhafi is one thing — undermining his government at the cost of media integrity and public knowledge is another. If a democracy is to work, those represented need to be kept accurately informed about the actions of their representatives.

We may never know whether the "disinformation campaign" was a success. We also may never know when the administration is telling the truth, and when they are "disinforming" for the sake of policy.

One administration official tried to gloss over the severity of the issue, saying, "You must distinguish between the audiences, you must distinguish between deception and disinformation."

The audience that deserves primary consideration is the American people, who the administration apparently overlooked. As for "disinformation," although it's popular political jargon, it's not really a word. That leaves only deception.

Robertson's views religious, secular

My occasional colleague in the column business, *Washington Post* editorial staffer Michael Barone, recently chastised people who ridicule someone else's religion. He specifically cited Garry Trudeau who, much to the discomfort of some newspaper editors, had a fine time in his "Doonesbury" comic strip with the Rev. Pat Robertson. Robertson did not complain, but some readers did and in a few newspapers for a few days "Doonesbury" was no more. For some of us, "Mary Worth" did not compensate.

Barone had a point. Of course, we should respect each other's religious beliefs. That is not only a matter of common courtesy, but in a pluralistic society, an urgent civic necessity. If Americans of countless religions, sects and denominations start to bicker about faith, we would have little time for anything else. It is best to leave such matters alone.

But Trudeau had the larger point. Robertson is a hybrid: a religious-political figure, who is more of the former than the latter. Having met with him, I know he has a political program. It is an extreme one, either radical or reactionary (choose your term), and certainly outside the American mainstream. He holds, for instance, that the states or individuals can disregard Supreme Court decisions to which they are not a party. More than 100 years of legal precedent and political tradition say otherwise.



Richard Cohen

To his followers and even to the rest of us, Robertson's politics are almost incidental. His religion is the broadest plank in his political platform and the reason he is in politics in the first place. He says, for instance, that he will run for president only if he gets the OK from God and, in an exchange of letters with his nemesis, Norman Lear, did some awesome name-dropping. Robertson pronounced himself an agent of God and warned Lear that he was in over his head: "Your arms are too short to box with God."

To me, to many Americans, those are startling statements. Robertson is entitled to make them, but not under a grant of immunity. If he says these things in a political context, then it seems to me that Trudeau can criticize him in the same context. That's not the same thing as picking on him for his religious beliefs. In Robertson's case, his religious beliefs are inseparable from his politics, and in this country we debate those matters, often in a rough-house fashion.

Can we not judge Robertson by what he says? Are we not entitled to comment on a presidential candidate who has made his religious views his main selling point? Do we have no opinion about a man who says he is an agent of God and who claims to have "rebuked" a hurricane by making it veer from its course? If he says in a political context that he has heard from God on an issue, can't we at least ask if the Lord called collect?

Increasingly in this country, we shy from any confrontation or criticism of religion, even when it intrudes upon the secular. No journalist has covered any of the recent so-called creationism trials

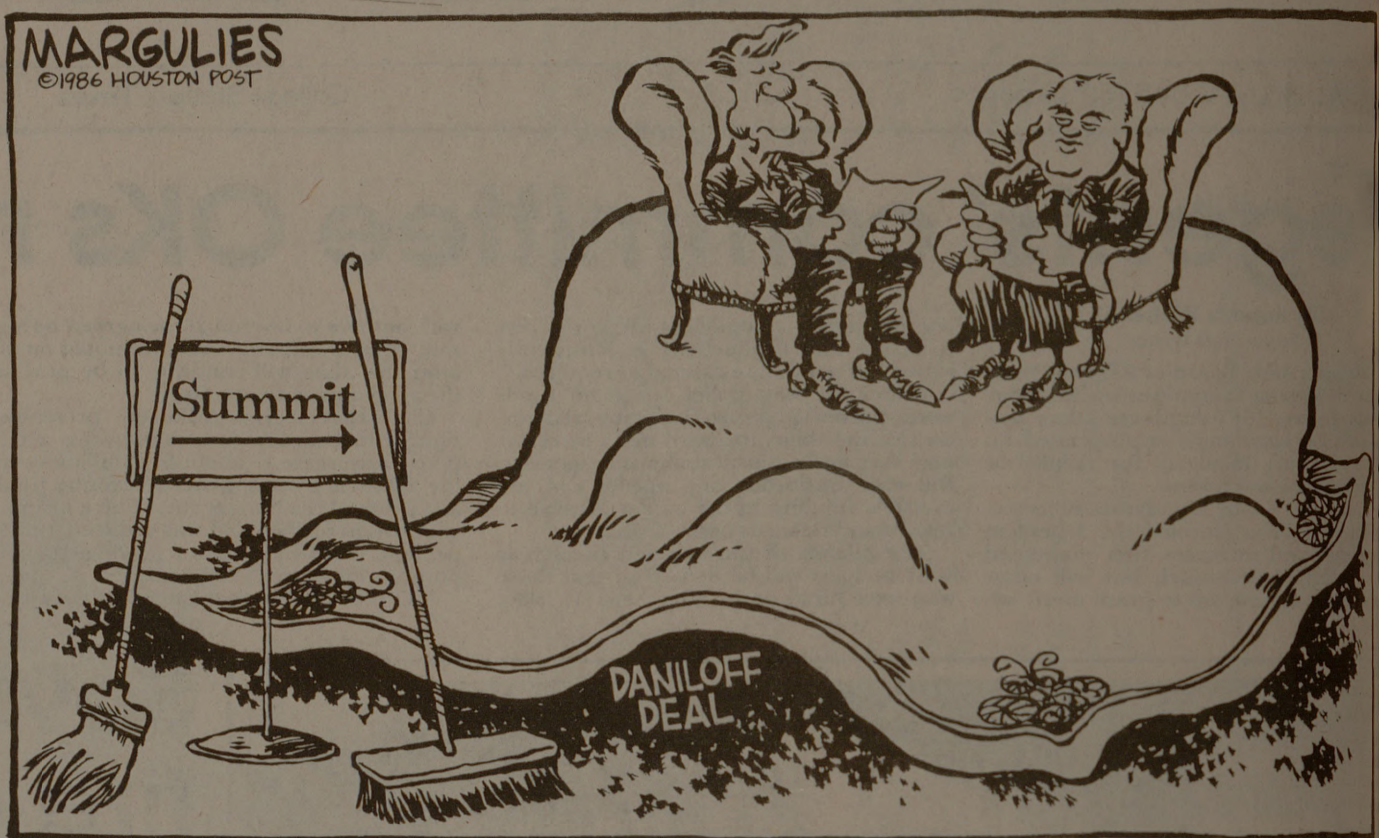
with the bite and ridicule that H.L. Menken brought to the same issues in the 1920s. We tend, instead, to treat all ideas as if they were equal: On the one hand evolution, on the other creationism. A balance is thought to be struck, but the scales are out of whack. Creationism is religious doctrine, unprovable and a matter of faith. Evolution is a scientific theory for which there is plenty of evidence. One does not balance the other. They are simply different.

Robertson is given the same sort of leeway. His pronouncements are considered unassailable simply because they are religious and, perhaps, because criticism of him would offend his followers. He is thus excused from offering any evidence of his statements, from the obligation to be logical or, even, to be fair. No one wants a theological debate, but the debate is not about theology but how Robertson applies it to politics. That debate ought to be vigorous.

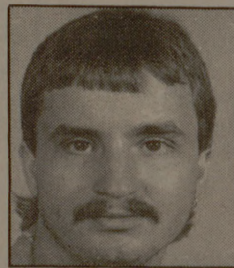
Like those who demand that the Biblical story of creation be taught in public schools as fact, Robertson has crossed a line by taking his religious beliefs into the political arena. He is in our court, a secular one where his religious beliefs will be treated like an ideology — respected by some, ridiculed by others — with no offense meant. They are no more off-limits than Ronald Reagan's quaint views on government, and we are entitled to judge him by them.

Trudeau, in fact, has been almost alone in doing so and rather than being censored or condemned, he ought to be praised. In his own way, he too rebuked a hurricane.

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With fall comes football — and reminders of lost glory



Craig Renfro

I think it had something to do with the fact that I weighed only 130 pounds — not exactly an intimidating player. But we tried hard, and it was fun — except for the pain. Besides, if you didn't play some type of athletics you just weren't part of the "in" crowd.

Needless to say, we didn't win many games. Often times we were close, but somehow in the end we managed to snap defeat from the jaws of victory.

I remember one game from my freshman year in particular. We were playing on our home field, my adrenaline was flowing and the crowd was cheering like crazy. I hadn't been in the game yet, but it was still the first quarter. I knew the coach would let me get in my obligatory four plays.

My first few plays were uneventful because the coaches had me run 40 yards down the field just so I would get out of the way of our running back, who happened to be sweeping to my side. I guess they figured that I would be more helpful if I made someone chase me down the sidelines rather than try a futile attempt at blocking him.

The game was nearing halftime and the score was knotted at zero. It was my turn to get into the game again, and the coach called my number. The play was XYZ219-FLY. In layman's terms that meant the split end ran as fast as he could down the field and the running back threw the pass after he had suckered everyone on the opposing team into believing that he was going to run with the ball.

I was the split end, and I remember running down the field as fast as I could. There wasn't anyone within 20 yards of me and I could see the ball lazily floating through the air with my

name on it. I thought touchdown for sure, and delusions of grandeur took over. I could just imagine all the girls flocking to me the following week of school, and how the coach would name me most valuable player and make me a starter.

Just about that time the ball was within my reach. I stretched out my arms to cuddle that bladder of leather. Instant hero, I thought. Then suddenly my bubble burst — the ball went right through my hands.

We went on to lose the game 20-0. Needless to say, I wasn't thrown the ball any more that year. I managed to stay with the team for two more years, but I think it was just because the coaches liked me and didn't want to boot me off.

My senior year I decided not to play because I wanted to work and make money instead of getting physically mangled at practice every day. Besides, the college scouts weren't exactly pounding at my door. I guess they had better things to do than waste their time on someone who would have been flattened by a linebacker if a pass was ever thrown over the middle.

Those days are behind me now, but I still manage to throw the ol' pigskin around and play intramural flag football. I have now ballooned to 155 pounds and probably lost some of my once-blazing speed that so impressed the coaches. But sometimes I wonder what if. . .

No, I really don't. I like playing the role of spectator because you can drink beer the whole game and not worry about throwing up the next day at practice.

Craig Renfro is a senior journalism major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

An invaluable ally

EDITOR:

Why is everyone against the South African government? South Africa supplies us with many valuable natural resources, it is pro-American and the government is anti-communist.

People who feel we can afford to lose an ally like South Africa are out of their minds. The close-minded liberals in this country that think we have a "moral obligation to break off financial support" to South Africa need to open their eyes.

What happened to our "moral obligation" while the Soviet Union was slaughtering innocent people in Afghanistan and while the Chinese government murdered millions in Cambodia? South Africa's human rights record is spotless when compared to our "friends" the Soviet Union and the People's Republic (joke) of China.

Why not get our priorities straight? President Reagan's South African policy can work if it is given time. Racism cannot be wiped out overnight, and Reagan is obviously intelligent enough to realize this fact. The South African government is making progress and we need to stand behind them, not try to punish them.

Mark Dean VanClause '90

Shattered memories

EDITOR:

A friend from Europe visited Aggieland for the Southern Mississippi football game. He lost his camera at the Memorial Student Center ping pong area about 3 p.m. Sept. 27. Let's demonstrate our Aggie Code of Honor.

It's a Yashika 35mm camera in a black case. The film is very important because he took pictures of the campus and all his new American friends. Please contact me at 260-4809. Thanks.

Yvette Santiesteban '89

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