
Profile: Richard Armitage

'Mud, Blood and Beer' in Foreign Policy

by Scott Thompson

Richard Armitage, the Iran-Contra era “knuckle-dragger” has been nominated to be the Deputy Secretary of State, responsible for the day-to-day decision-making at Foggy Bottom. If Secretary of State Colin Powell, who once referred to Armitage as his “best friend,” is known as “General Teflon,” for his pristine reputation, Armitage is known in Washington circles for having one of the most tarnished records. Armitage would be to U.S. foreign policy what John Ashcroft means for U.S. justice—and this time, Senate Democrats should not sell out! Allegations of Armitage’s corruption include involvement in the notorious CIA Southeast Asian heroin ring during the Vietnam War, gun-running during the “Iran-Contra” secret parallel government under Vice President Sir George Bush and Oliver North, and charges of ties to a prostitution and drug ring that serviced the greater Washington, D.C. area.

Armitage also has a policy record: He is one of the most vocal advocates of a Contra-style war against Saddam Hussein. He has pushed for the militarization of American policy towards Asia, beginning with the re-armament of Japan as an ally against China and North Korea. He is vocally against the Korean “Sunshine” policy of normalization and eventual reunification of the Korean Peninsula. In a recent speech, he propounded a “more muscular” American foreign policy, describing himself as the man who would bring “blood, mud, and beer” to the State Department.

In brief, Armitage personifies the spook apparatus of neo-conservatives, deeply tied into the Ariel Sharon wing of Israeli intelligence, who will steer the United States, helter-skelter, into regional wars and crises.

The Southeast Asia Drug Traffic

In November 1986, the most highly decorated Vietnam War veteran, Col. James “Bo” Gritz, traveled to Burma (now Myanmar), to track down U.S. soldiers listed as missing in action, who he believed were prisoners of war—the POW/MIAs. During that trip, he videotaped an interview with Shan United Army leader Khun Sa, which controlled the opium production, which became part of documentary film, “A Nation Betrayed.”

In the videotaped interview with Khun Sa’s Secretary,

Gritz was told: “In 1965 to 1975 there is one CIA in Laos, his name was [Theodore] Shackley. He was involved the narcotics business. And we know that Shackley used one civilian to organize trafficking. His civilian name was Santos Trafficante. . . . This was financed by Richard Armitage who stayed in Vietnam. After the Vietnam War, Richard Armitage was a prominent trafficker in Bangkok.

“This was between 1975 to 1979, he was a very active trafficker in Bangkok. He was one of the [U.S.] Embassy employees. Then after that, in 1979, he quit from Embassy, and then he established a company name[d] the Far East Trading Company. Then he used the name of his company under the table for drug trafficking. He then used the drug money to support the Lao anti-communist troops.

Gritz: “So he used it in arms and munitions?”

Secretary: “Yes.”

After the documentary had aired nationally, Gritz spoke at the American Liberty Lunch Club: “You know where Richard Armitage went in 1979? He went to [Sen. Bob] Dole’s staff, then to Reagan’s campaign staff and now he is the Assistant Secretary of Defense right underneath Mr. [Frank] Carlucci,” referring to Armitage’s position as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Perhaps even worse, Armitage had delayed by more than ten years, peace between Khun Sa, and his Shan United Army, with the central Myanmar government (SLORC), and also turned down a treaty through which Khun Sa would have destroyed his opium supplies.

After Colonel Gritz had finished an unfruitful attempt to find MIAs/POWs in 1987, he brought back with him an offer from Khun Sa, which no one would listen to—except that Gritz was charged with violating passport regulations, by allegedly having used a false passport.

In Spring 1989, Gritz went back to Myanmar, and returned with Khun Sa’s proposal, and a video of Khun Sa pleading with the United States to support the Shan proposal to end drug production in exchange for economic development aid. He also brought another offer: “Khun Sa wants to reveal the identity of all government employees, with whom he did business. He said, these had been his best business partners for 20 years.”

The “Overview” section of that proposal included: “As the expenditure of worldwide drug suppression funds grows so does the production and distribution of opium products. Billions of dollars have been spent to stop drugs, yet trafficking from the Golden Triangle has steadily escalated. In 1986, more than 900 tons passed through this area. The figure increased to 1,200 tons in 1989; this year production will exceed 2,000 tons. . . . Existing drug suppression programs aren’t working.

“How do you think such enormous shipments can be exported from this underdeveloped region without the badges, credentials, clearances, and involvement of corrupt authorities? It can’t and it isn’t! Taxpayer dollars only increase the

incentives of those involved in drug suppression to increase the flow of narcotics. . . .

“It must be remembered that we are not the genesis of the heroin problem. It was the British that exploited cultivation and passed laws to protect distribution of opium that addicted East Asia. During the French Indochina era drugs continued to be used for political and commercial advantage by foreign interests. . . .

“After the communist takeover in 1975, the CIA stockpiled weapons in Thailand and the Philippines to continue operations in Southeast Asia. Heroin provides the means. Officials arrange the laundry of funds through international banks. Mafia contacts handle worldwide distribution. We were not surprised to learn of Mr. Richard Armitage’s appointment as U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia. He is well known to us as a key member of the CIA drug team. His position over this part of the world will assure business as usual while securing his involvement. . . .

“Let there be no mistake. We have the desire, will, ability, and stand ready to wipe out opium from the Golden Triangle. To do this will take some time, diplomatic cooperation, technical assistance, and money.”

The Iran-Contra Fiasco

On Aug. 28, 1986, according to grand jury testimony, published by Independent Counsel Lawrence E. Walsh in his “Final Report of the Independent Counsel for Iran/Contra Matters,” Richard Armitage was present and gave his consent to Oliver North’s Contra supply plans. Armitage is otherwise named repeatedly as a key participant in Iran-Contra, while he was Assistant Secretary of State for International Security Affairs.

On Nov. 19, 1985, National Security Adviser Lt. Col. Robert C. McFarlane requested approval for the sale of some 500 U.S. Hawk missiles, which would transfer them to Iran, in exchange for the release of five hostages being held in Lebanon, on Nov. 21. Secretary of Defense Weinberger had Armitage informed on the matter. McFarlane overrode Weinberger’s objections, with a purported order from President Ronald Reagan. From Walsh’s summary report, it appears that Armitage agreed to the sale.

However, that deal fell through. In December, Armitage was approached by the Pentagon’s Israel desk officer Diana Blundell, for the sale of 18 Hawk missiles to Israel, again to end up in Iran. In her one-page report to Armitage, “Proposals for Immediate Shipment of I-HAWK and I-TOW Missiles,” she detailed that there were also 3,300 of the modern version of the TOW anti-tank missiles available for shipping to Israel as well. The total package was priced at \$22.5 million. Armitage then helped draft a paper entitled “Possibility for Leaks,” whose only objection to the proposed deal was that the size of the deal might make it vulnerable to occasional leaks leading to legal difficulties. Armitage later

claimed that he had no recollection of such a request having been made.

There can be little doubt, that if the Democratic Senators stand firm against Armitage’s nomination, the Bush Administration will fold its hand and withdraw it. Armitage himself has done so, in at least two other nominations.

On Feb. 9, 1989, Armitage was nominated as Assistant Secretary of State for Far East and Pacific Affairs, after five years in the Pentagon as the chief “dirty operations” specialist, as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. When of Armitage’s dirty laundry was aired for the Senate, on March 27, 1989, President Sir George Bush suddenly announced its withdrawal of his nomination.

Next, Armitage was nominated to be Secretary of the Army. But, on May 26, 1992, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney was forced to announce that Armitage had withdrawn his name, apparently because he ran the risk of being interrogated on his role in Iran-Contra, and on his relationship with a woman, who had been convicted of illegal gambling.

One Congressional official declared: “Every time his name comes up, people raise allegations about Iran-Contra, the old charges that he was involved in some kind of drug operation in Vietnam, and other personal allegations.” Another official said that Armitage “had watched with concern as Senators questioned Donald Gregg about his role in Iran-Contra,” during his confirmation hearings as Ambassador to South Korea. This time, Armitage had his name withdrawn, and also resigned as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

‘Kiss the Boys Goodbye’

In their book *Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed its Own POWs in Vietnam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), Monika Jensen-Stevenson and William Stevenson raise more of Armitage’s crimes against the U.S. men in uniform in the Vietnam War. Monika Jensen-Stevenson’s scrutiny of the U.S. government’s betrayal of its own POWs/MIAs in Vietnam provides an important added piece of this ugly picture.

The deeper the Stevensons dug into the POW-MIA mess, the nastier it got. Pentagon and CIA hit teams, they were told, had been sent into the jungles of Southeast Asia to assassinate American soldiers in order to cover up scandals that could blow the lid off the Pentagon and Langley. One CIA team leader, Jerrald Daniels, balked at the idea of killing fellow Americans, and he died under mysterious circumstances. In her investigation, Jensen-Stevenson discovered that some of the leading figures in that 20th-Century replay of the Opium Wars were senior Reagan Administration officials. Richard Armitage, who was then still a top official in the Sir George Bush’s Administration, played a pivotal role in blocking the efforts to get to the bottom of the POW/MIA tragedy, a cover-up for which he should be brought to account.

But, first and foremost, his nomination must be stopped.