

South of the border (occasional snippets from)

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The Havana Syndrome

Referenced elsewhere in these pages, I find the Havana Syndrome most intriguing. That name, however, is a misnomer as there have been complaints by embassy staff in locations other than the Cuban capital. And the diplomats affected have not been solely from the United States either, as one might think from reading some of the media coverage of these strange goings-on.

As is often the case, I managed to find an element of black humour in the fact that there has been more than a little victim-shaming – sometimes subtle, other times not so. Take, for example, a piece by Gordon Corera for the BBC in 2021, detailing information on U.S. diplomats who were suing their government employer.¹ Corera states that ‘members of the public, some with mental health issues, approach [a lawyer representing “Havana Syndrome” victims] claiming to suffer from microwave attacks’. A neat little smear by association, as the alleged sufferers of the microwave attacks² report very similar symptoms to those being experienced by the numerous diplomats.

And it’s not as if the CIA doesn’t have form in medically messing around with unwitting members of both its own staff and/or the public. Under the auspices of the infamous Sidney Gottlieb and his MK-ULTRA programme: ‘unwitting subjects endured psychological torture ranging from electroshock to high doses of LSD’.³

Fear not though because, per Corera, ‘The CIA has taken over the hunt for a cause, with a veteran of the hunt for Osama bin Laden placed in charge.’⁴ Fast forward a couple of years and what do we have as a result? Answer: more

¹ “‘Havana syndrome’ and the mystery of the microwaves’ – 9 September, 2021 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58396698>>.

² A subject which has also been covered from time to time by this publication – principally by the editor in his View from the Bridge column.

³ See *The CIA's Secret Quest For Mind Control: Torture, LSD And A 'Poisoner In Chief'* by Terry Gross for NPR, 9 September, 2019 at <<https://tinyurl.com/mt66sfhk>> or <<https://www.npr.org/2019/09/09/758989641/the-cias-secret-quest-for-mind-control-torture-isd-and-a-poisoner-in-chief>>.

⁴ Yes, I also thought ‘That shouldn’t take long, then!’

victim-shaming, with 'Havana Syndrome Unlikely Caused by Foreign Adversary or Weapon, U.S. Report Says' being one headline a couple of months ago in the *Wall Street Journal*.⁵ The entire matter was dismissed as a combination of 'pre-existing medical conditions, conventional illnesses and environmental factors'. So, the reported '250 to 300' U.S. diplomats⁶ – and those from other nations – who have suffered these debilitating symptoms are being told they're literally the wrong (already ill) person, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

Nothing to see here!

Barbra Streisand-ing Area 51

Imagine you have been running a website devoted to the mysterious Area 51 – and the associated Tonopah Test Range (TTR) – for decades. There has been virtually zero interest from officialdom, but then your front door is kicked in early one morning and your home is raided by the FBI. That's what has happened to Joerg Arnu, the owner/webmaster of *dreamlandresort.com*, whose home in the small town of Rachel, Nevada (the closest settlement to the secret base) was so raided on 16 November last year. The home of his partner, in Las Vegas, was simultaneously entered – both intrusions occurring under the auspices of a search warrant.

According to those search warrants, copies of which Mr Arnu has uploaded to a new website – *area51fbiraid.com* – dedicated to this peculiar event, the Feds were tasked with finding evidence of 'Photographing and Sketching Defence Installations', 'Use of an Aircraft for Photographing Defence Installations' and 'Publication and Sale of Photographs of Defence Installations'. This is, frankly, bemusing because Mr Arnu has had rather blurry, long-range photographs of both Area 51 and the TTR on his website for donkey's years.

My thought is that some short time before the raid, he had to have added one or more pictures to his website that, without him knowing, includes something highly sensitive. However, by their heavy-handed actions, the FBI

⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/25mznv79>> or <<https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/havana-syndrome-unlikely-caused-by-foreign-adversary-or-weapon-u-s-report-says-ca81e601>>

⁶ The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Havana Syndrome: Medical, Scientific, and Policy Perspectives conference; video file 1, 'Overview and Welcome'. Conference webpage at <<https://tinyurl.com/bdzzyxwc>> or <<https://www.utsouthwestern.edu/education/medical-school/departments/psychiatry/research/havana-syndrome-conference.html>>. Video file 1 hosted at <<https://player.vimeo.com/video/680967037?h=18e0348243>>.

have managed to do a 'Barbra Streisand'⁷ and attract a whole load more attention to Area 51 generally. On the *area51fbiraid.com* site, there's a list of twenty media stories from a variety of news sites – both local and international – including *Fox News, Gizmodo, Sky News, MSN, The Sun* and even the USAF's own *Air Force Times*.⁸ Using a Google search I easily found a plethora of further coverage from – amongst many others – *CBS News, Yahoo News, The Independent* and *The Times*.

Congrats to those at the FBI who signed off on the idea for the raid.

RIP QEII - a good time to bury bad news

During the week following the death of Queen Elizabeth II the UK – indeed, the world's – media were focussed on little else. No surprise, therefore, that news of the financial settlement from the British state to the family of Loughlin Maginn – killed in 1989 following collusion between the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) – was released then.⁹

The Loyalist killers believed Maginn to be an IRA intelligence officer because the British state had, effectively, told them so. In an attempt to counter the family's denial that Maginn had any IRA connection, 'the UDA released Maginn's personal file, compiled by British Military Intelligence and leaked by two UDR men'.¹⁰ And the Army's Force Research Unit (FRU) knew that all this was going on because their agent, Brian Nelson, had helped facilitate the plot.¹¹

⁷ In 2003 Ms Streisand sued an aerial photographer for taking a photo of her home on the Californian coast and publishing it on the Internet. He had done so merely as part of a highly innocuous series of Pacific coastline pics. However, the diva's lawsuit failed and the accompanying media coverage created such a hullabaloo that visits to the website hosting the pics went from less than ten in total to almost half a million a month!

Elon Musk, the owner of Twitter (and, I have to stress, *not* a relative!), experienced something similar when he tried to suppress the publication of data relating to his private jet. See <<https://www.newsweek.com/streisand-effect-elon-musk-twitter-bans-1767701>>.

⁸ See <<https://www.area51fbiraid.com/media.html>>.

⁹ See, for instance, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-62927955>>.

¹⁰ Tony Geraghty, *The Irish War* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) p. 230.

¹¹ 'Loughlin Maginn murder sparked events that led to collusion probe', *The Irish News*, 17 September, 2022 at <<https://tinyurl.com/mryt3xdx>> or <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2022/09/17/news/loughlin_maginn_murder_sparked_collusion_probe-2830999/>.

There are potentially close to 100 similar cases¹² that could be settled the same way, with an 'undisclosed' sum being paid out. And, if any of them are, they'll likely be timed to coincide with a similarly attention distracting world news event.¹³

Trump and classified material post-Presidency

The fact that Donald Trump mishandled classified material would seem to be beyond doubt. His stashing of documents with national security classification markings – not only at his Mar-a-Lago home but elsewhere, note¹⁴ – shows a consistently loose relationship with the need for genuine secrecy.

What's also widely acknowledged, is that Trump's approach to business and, latterly, politics has always had a very transactional nature to it. In a piece for *The Atlantic* in 2020, which detailed 'Where Trump Learned the Art of the Quid Pro Quo', Andrea Bernstein neatly explained this by quoting Trump himself. Confronted, during the 2016 campaign, with the fact that he had previously donated money to Democrats, Trump claimed:

'I give to many people', he said. 'Before this, before two months ago, I was a businessman. I give to everybody. When they call, I give. And do you know what? When I need something from them two years later, three years later, I call them, they are there for me.'¹⁵

And, as Maggie Haberman has said, 'much of what happened during the presidency' and, indeed, now post-presidency 'was foretold by the earlier parts of Trump's life'.¹⁶

¹² 'The security forces colluded with loyalist paramilitaries in 80 deaths between July 1972 and June 1978' at <<https://tinyurl.com/4dh7b3c7>> or <<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/british-state-involved-in-mass-murder-on-british-soil-colluded-with-loyalist-paramilitaries-in-80-deaths-between-1972-and-1978/31091074.html>> and 'thirty-seven people [were] murdered by Loyalists through 1988 and August 1989' – Geraghty, *The Irish War* p. 230 (see footnote 11). The killing of Loughlin Maginn was on 24 August 1989.

¹³ The Maginn family have had to wait 30 years, whereas Loughlin died when he was only 28.

¹⁴ The papers seem to have drifted all over the place! See, for example, 'Trump team finds two documents with classified markings in a Florida storage unit' at <<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/07/politics/trump-lawyers-properties-search/index.html>>.

¹⁵ 'Where Trump Learned the Art of the Quid Pro Quo' at <<https://tinyurl.com/bdhh2xd4>> or <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/trumps-brand-of-transactional-politics/604978/>>.

¹⁶ Maggie Haberman, *Confidence Man – The Making of Donald Trump and the Breaking of America* (London: Penguin Random House, 2022) p. 13.

But I don't think it's actual access to what you and I would class as sensitive material – e.g. information on the specific military capabilities of foreign nations, etc. – that has motivated Trump. If anything, he will have been keen to see and retain *dirt* on foreign leaders, both friend and foe. I say this because Trump has had a long documented relationship with the U.S.'s salacious publisher-in-chief – David Pecker of the *National Enquirer*.¹⁷ This was so much the case that, during the 2016 election, when the 'National Enquirer Had Decades of Trump Dirt. He Wanted to Buy It All'¹⁸ – a Machiavellian technique known as 'catch and kill'.¹⁹

That Trump has had something of an obsession with the private lives of foreign leaders became public a couple of times during his Presidency. The third of Trump's four Press Secretaries was Stephanie Grisham²⁰ and, in her (highly predictable) tell-all-the-horror-stories book on her time at The White House,²¹ she described an incident on Air Force One when Trump alleged to her that the mother of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had 'fucked all of the Rolling Stones'. And Trump also 'Bragged He Had "Intelligence" on Macron's Sex Life' – going as far as to claim 'that he learned about some of this dirt through "intelligence" he had seen or been briefed on'. It was *Rolling Stone* which broke that story in the aftermath of the FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago, when the list of documents seized included 'item 1a' which was listed solely as 'info re: President of France'.²²

Where the documents Trump illegally had in his possession were of genuine relevance to national security, I don't believe he will have been

¹⁷ For any Brits lucky enough not to know of the *National Enquirer*, you can check out its website at <<https://www.nationalenquirer.com/>>.

¹⁸ 'National Enquirer Had Decades of Trump Dirt. He Wanted to Buy It All', Jim Rutenberg and Maggie Haberman, *New York Times*, 30 August, 2018 <<https://tinyurl.com/5x8tjj53>> or <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/30/nyregion/trump-cohen-national-enquirer-american-media-recording.html>>.

¹⁹ For an example of this, see 'National Enquirer owner admits to "catch and kill" payment to ex-Playmate' at <<https://tinyurl.com/yhtcctyd>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/12/national-enquirer-trump-payments-david-pecker-catch-and-kill>>.

²⁰ Infamous, as Press Secretary, for holding zero press conferences. See (e.g.) 'Press Secretary Who Never Held Briefing Leaving Her White House Post' from *VOA News* (which is kind of like the *BBC World Service* for the USA) at <<https://tinyurl.com/u2mr7prc>> or <https://www.voanews.com/a/usa_us-politics_press-secretary-who-never-held-briefing-leaving-her-white-house-post/6187132.html>.

²¹ Stephanie Grisham, *I'll Take Your Questions Now: What I Saw at the Trump White House* (London: Harper Colins, 2021).

²² See <<https://tinyurl.com/3ydjj97y>> or <<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/donald-trump-emmanuel-macron-maralago-fbi-raid-1234582465/>>.

showing them to people because he wanted to destabilise the United States: he'd have had absolutely no care either way about that. He would have been doing it as a means of gaining a hold, an influence, a *quid-pro-quo*, over those specific people. This is because Donald Trump himself is so impressionable, so easily ensnared.²³ In this, he has been described by no less an expert than his niece Mary L. Trump (a psychologist) as 'somebody so manipulable',²⁴ and by Presidential biographer Jon Meacham as 'unusually susceptible to the last person he spoke to'.²⁵

Put simply: Trump thinks everyone is as sleazy and easily manipulable as he is himself, and wants to be able to prove it.

. . . and the CIA will have given him the ammo

In his quest for dirt on international leaders, Trump would have discovered – no doubt to his delight – that the CIA were well positioned to help him. The person who 'invented the field at the C.I.A.' and 'the founder of its Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior'²⁶ – Jerrold M. Post – gave it the slightly anodyne moniker 'at-a-distance leader personality assessment in support of policy'.²⁷ The first of these was produced during World War II and analysed the personality of Adolf Hitler. The proposals for clandestine operations that were drawn up as a result of these profiles were more than a bit whacky themselves.

After conducting a long-range psychological profile of Hitler's personality, this group [of OSS psychoanalysts] decided the Fuehrer could be undone by exposing him to vast quantities of pornography. The OSS men collected the finest library of German smut ever assembled in the United States. The material was to be dropped by plane in the area

²³ Reams have been written about this specific subject, including Craig Unger's *American Kompromat: How the KGB Cultivated Donald Trump, and Related Tales of Sex, Greed, Power, and Treachery* (New York: Dutton, 2021)

²⁴ Mary L. Trump, *The Reckoning: Our Nation's Trauma and Finding a Way to Heal* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2021) p. 65.

²⁵ See <<https://tinyurl.com/fk8cb9he>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/04/barack-obama-donald-trump-phonerecalls-transition>>.

²⁶ Jerrold M. Post obituary, *New York Times*, 12 December, 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/us/jerrold-m-post-dead.html>>.

²⁷ Jerrold M. Post (ed.), *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) Chapter 3, p. 39. Post reveals that the first such profile of a foreign leader had been instigated by the OSS in 1942.

surrounding Hitler's headquarters on the assumption that the Fuehrer would step outside, pick up some bit of it and immediately be thrown into paroxysms of madness.²⁸

The scheme did not go ahead because the first Army Air Corps officer who was told of the plan was too sane and refused to carry it out.²⁹

The things you notice when watching old TV shows

The Sandbaggers was a television show produced by Yorkshire TV which ran for three seasons between September 1978 and July 1980. It was created by ex-Royal Navy officer Ian MacKintosh, and the foreword to his biography, written by Nigel West, states: 'From the moment the first episode of *The Sandbaggers* was broadcast, the intelligence community knew that it was the only television series that had more than a veneer of verisimilitude.'³⁰ Ever since MacKintosh' died in a light plane crash over Alaska in 1979, there has been much speculation about his possible intelligence background. Regardless of that, watching through the whole series recently, I spotted a some interesting moments.

Firstly there was the amusing spectacle of seeing an SIS stringer in Malta portrayed as having an Austin Allegro as his work-provided drive! (This was quite likely true, for the late 70s, but still highly amusing.) The other was a blink-and-you-missed it mention – in February of 1980³¹ – of Ulrich Wegener, the head of Germany's anti-terrorist force GSG9. In contrast, the book *Fire Magic: Hijack at Mogadishu* by ex-SAS Sergeant Major Barry Davies (which detailed how he and Major Alastair Morrison had provided technical assistance to a GSG9 unit at Mogadishu airport in 1977) was not allowed to be published (by Bloomsbury) until 1994.

Perhaps the most striking thing I noticed was in the fifth episode of season

²⁸ Richard Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972) Chapter 7.

²⁹ Efforts by Vladimir Putin to play on Trump's weakness for glamorous women were somewhat more subtle. In her book (see note 22), Ms Grisham says that a female translator at the 2019 G20 meeting in Osaka 'had been selected by Putin specifically to distract our president'. And Grisham further states that it seemed to work.

³⁰ Robert G. Folsom, *The Life and Mysterious Death of Ian Mackintosh* (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2012)

³¹ This was in the second episode of the second series, titled *Enough of Ghosts*. First broadcast on 4 February 1980 this was a good three months before the Iranian Embassy siege and the propelling of the SAS – and special forces in general – into the public's consciousness.

two,³² which has the CIA head of station in London accusing the FBI of being involved in the cover-up that followed the assassination of JFK. This was broadcast on mainstream British media in the early 1980s – when there wasn't really much 'alternative' to the mainstream – and it was pretty radical stuff, for the time.

A bit of quick research³³ and, lo-and-behold, I found a significant connection between LBJ and Hoover that pre-dated the 1960s:

LBJ won a quick and uncontested vote from Congress granting Hoover his salary in perpetuity, from July 1958 onward, until the day he died.

Johnson would see to it that Hoover never had to retire from the FBI.³⁴

Hoover, therefore, owed Johnson and eventually paid him back by ensuring the FBI scuppered the investigation into JFK's assassination.

James Bond & JFK

You don't have to be an actor playing James Bond to know who *really* killed JFK, but it helps. The time when George Lazenby claimed on live TV that prominent US figures had been involved in the JFK assassination has been mentioned in the pages of *Lobster*.³⁵ What hasn't been mentioned is that Roger Moore claimed something quite similar.

As part of the contract for Moore to take over the Bond role in 1972/3, for *Live and Let Die*, he was obliged to keep a contemporaneous diary during the film's shooting. It was originally published as a tie-in to the release of the film and then, more recently, re-issued after Moore's death. Nestled amongst the more mundane accounts of on-set/off-set behaviour – with copious references to where, when and what he was eating and drinking – is this blink-and-you'd-miss-it snippet:

The rest of the day proved to be just as interesting, if in a different way. Jim Garrison, the District Attorney, who conducted his own investigation into the assassination of Kennedy, invited me, along with a couple of FBI agents, to his office to view some film. I am not at liberty to

³² 'It Couldn't Happen Here' originally broadcast 25 February 1980.

³³ A.K.A. some light *Googling* and downloading a couple of books.

³⁴ Tim Weiner, *Enemies: A History of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012) p. 235.

³⁵ Simon Matthews in *Lobster* 58 at <<https://tinyurl.com/2p98eb82>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/58/the-devil-has-all-the-best-songs-reflections-on-the-life-and-times-of-simon-dee/>>.

disclose what I saw, but it left no doubt in my mind that it was not Oswald who fired the fatal shot. Garrison's assertion is that Oswald was not acting alone, but as part of a CIA conspiracy.³⁶

Hmm.

³⁶ Sir Roger Moore, *The 007 Diaries: Filming Live and Let Die* (Stroud: The History Press, 2018) pp. 61-62.