Right-wing “dirty tricks” and the Clinton scandal

Martin McLaughlin
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The sex scandal that has rocked the Clinton Administration has all the hallmarks of a well-planned “dirty tricks” conspiracy, involving individuals with long-standing links to neo-fascist elements within and on the fringes of the Republican Party, covert operations specialists in the national security apparatus, and right-wing propagandists who hold powerful positions in the media. The curricula vitae and political agenda of these individuals have been largely ignored, if not actually covered up, in the mainstream media.

Linda Tripp, who tape-recorded conversations with Monica Lewinsky and turned them over to special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, was married for 21 years to a career army officer, and traveled with him, working as a civilian employee of the US military at a series of overseas and US bases. According to press accounts based on her resume, Tripp worked as a secretary in a classified unit of the US Army Intelligence Command at Fort Meade, Maryland in 1987, and a year later shifted to the office of the Delta Force in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Delta Force is the elite special forces command, trained to carry out assassinations, terrorist attacks and other “black” operations ordered by the Pentagon.

Fort Bragg is the location which North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms warned Clinton not to visit in 1993, suggesting that his life would be in danger because of the widespread hostility in the military to his avoidance of the draft during the Vietnam War and policy proposals such as restricting the persecution of gay soldiers.

In 1990 Tripp moved back to Washington, beginning a four-year stint in the White House, working first for Bush and then for Clinton. According to her resume, her duties were not limited to routine clerical operations, but included political responsibilities. She wrote that in one assignment she “monitored major news outlets including Nexis Lexis to include major dailies throughout the country, weeklies and screen media as part of a continuing rapid response damage control.”

Tripp was called to testify twice by congressional Republicans, once on the firing of the staff of the White House travel office, and once on the handling of the suicide of Vincent Foster. Tripp had worked as executive assistant for White House counsel Bernard Nussbaum, Foster’s boss, and at one point was given the task of copying the Clinton family’s tax records. In one significant portion of her testimony, she contrasted the procedures used in the internal White House investigation of the Foster suicide to the more rigorous methods employed by intelligence agencies. “I’ve worked on the covert side of the Department of Defense,” she declared.

After this public criticism and Nussbaum’s ouster as counsel, Tripp transferred to the Pentagon where she was given a press relations position paying double her White House salary. She also made contact with Lucianne Goldberg, a New York literary agent who was looking for a former White House employee to supply inside dirt on the Clinton administration. They were introduced by a mutual friend, conservative columnist and television commentator Tony Snow, who had met Tripp when both worked in the Bush White House in 1992. According to Snow’s own column published Monday, he found Tripp to be not merely a competent civil servant, but a highly political woman, intensely interested in the substance of policy and the political survival of the Bush administration.

Snow—who is covering the Clinton scandal as a supposedly “objective” reporter for the Fox TV network—brought her to Goldberg to discuss the

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possibility of publishing her account of the White House during the days following the suicide of Vincent Foster, a subject of obsessive interest in extreme right-wing political circles. Goldberg had unsuccessfully represented a series of clients who hoped to peddle anti-Clinton books based on allegations of his sexual escapades, including several Arkansas state troopers who escorted the then-governor and at least one woman who claimed a past relationship with Clinton.

Goldberg was associated with a right-wing publishing house which brought out the volume "Unlimited Access" in 1996, an anti-Clinton diatribe by former FBI agent Gary Aldrich. Her biggest literary "success," however, was to broker the best-selling book by former Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman, whose overt racism became notorious during the O.J. Simpson murder trial. A long-time right-wing political activist, Goldberg was involved in the "dirty tricks" operations of the Nixon administration. In 1972 she was paid $1,000 a week by Republican Party functionary F. Murray Chotiner, a Nixon hatchet man, to infiltrate the campaign of George McGovern, posing as a reporter who traveled with the Democratic candidate on his campaign plane, while supplying political intelligence to the Nixon campaign. Goldberg's role was made public during the Watergate inquiry.

According to press accounts, it was Goldberg who urged Linda Tripp to begin tape recording her conversations with Monica Lewinsky. She subsequently arranged for a meeting between Tripp and Michael Isikoff of Newsweek magazine last fall at the Washington home of her son. At that meeting Tripp discussed the content of her conversations with Monica Lewinsky and offered to play one of the tapes for the reporter.

Goldberg has not sought to disguise her political motivation in helping trigger the current scandal. On the contrary, in militia-type language, she told one publication that she would have "stood outside the White House with a deer rifle" if necessary to pursue her opposition to Clinton and his policies.

Tripp's attorney James Moody has roots in the same right-wing milieu. Moody is not a specialist in white collar defense cases, but a right-wing lawyer-activist who calls himself a libertarian. He has done volunteer work for the Landmark Legal Foundation, which has been active in pursuing the Clinton administration's role in the campaign finance scandal. Currently he is advising the foundation on a lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service, charging that right-wing advocacy groups are being singled out for IRS audits.

One of the principal financial backers of Landmark Legal Foundation is Richard Mellon Scaife, billionaire heir to the banking family fortune, the man most responsible for keeping alive the "Vincent Foster was murdered" conspiracy theory through articles published in his Pittsburgh-area daily newspaper, the *Greensburg Tribune-Review*.

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