

Good Cop, Bad Cop

Written by Harvey M. Sapolsky

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HARVEY M. SAPOLSKY, SEP 9 2018

We just completed a week of memorials for Senator John McCain. There were five formal services—two in Arizona, the state McCain represented in Congress, two in Washington D.C., the nation's capital, and one at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis Maryland from which he graduated and where he was buried—all of which McCain planned in detail after he received a terminal diagnosis for brain cancer. Conspicuously absent from any of the services at McCain's mandate was President Donald Trump with whom McCain feuded. Several of the speakers at these services, including his daughter, made thinly disguised disparaging comparisons of the President with McCain who had been a combat pilot in Vietnam and held as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for more than five years after being shot down. In contrast, President Trump had been deferred from conscription several times in that war, supposedly for a bone spur in his foot though no one can remember which foot it was that had the problem as the defect seemed to heal quickly after his eligibility for service expired.

The feud probably had many causes though most trace it to a rally Trump held in Arizona early in his 2016 campaign for the presidency which McCain trashed by claiming Trump had "fired up the crazies." Trump who forgets no slight later responded to an interviewer when asked if he regarded McCain as a hero, "He's not a war hero. He's a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured." McCain, the son and grandson of four-star admirals, was not only captured, but was tortured by the North Vietnamese to the point at which he was permanently disabled, not able to lift his arms above his shoulders.

Some say those who experience the horrors of war are least likely to advocate more wars while those who escape its costs are too willing to commit others to risk life and limb in conflicts. Not so for McCain and Trump. McCain was an unashamed hawk, the champion of an interventionist foreign policy for the United States. He supported the Vietnam War but also the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and lots more. He famously said of relations with Iran, "bomb, bomb, bomb." Trump, in contrast, has generally been in favor of keeping America's forces home. He thought most of our post 9/11 ventures were foolish. While McCain called Putin the enemy, Trump has sought better relations with the Russian leader.

America's European allies will soon have a decision to make: Do they honor America the global intervener by naming the new \$1.4 billion NATO headquarters building after John McCain, the champion of intervention nearly everywhere, as proposed by several former secretary generals or do they recognize that there is growing skepticism in America about endless involvement in other people's security and avoid insulting this view's very vocal advocate, President Trump, and bury the idea? McCain was happy to have the United States be the global policeman; Trump is not. Trump has recently even questioned the need to honor Article Five in the NATO Charter, the all for one clause, when tiny Montenegro, NATO's 29th member, was being added to the roster. He is also called out most of the other NATO members for failing to pay their fair share of Europe's defense, colorfully noting America's defense burden by saying "We're the schmucks who pay for it all." That is surely the case with NATO's headquarters building. To which American to show deference—one American is the symbol of American meddlesome power, the other is the symbol of the new (or is it old) American caution? Which is the good cop, and which is the bad one?

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Harvey M. Sapolsky is Professor of Public Policy and Organization, Emeritus, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and former Director of the MIT Security Studies Program. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Michigan and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In the defense field he has served as a consultant or panel member for a number of government commissions and study groups. His most recent books are *US Defense Politics* written with Eugene Gholz and Caitlin Talmadge and *US Military Innovation Since the Cold War* edited with Benjamin Friedman and Brendan Green, both published by Routledge.