



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 14, 2014

Government Credibility Gap Is Alive and Growing

I hope the public will duly take note. Even the FBI chief is now [advising us to be “deeply skeptical” of government](#). In the *60 Minutes* interview aired on CBS Sunday evening, FBI Director James Comey could give Cassandra a run for her money.

But this story, like many we find in the media, has a misleading headline. Yes, Director Comey pays lip service to the Founders’ distrust of concentrated power and to the wise division of power among three branches of government, each supposedly jealous of its own delegated authority. (Congress seems to have forgotten to be jealous.) But then Comey seems more fearful of people protecting themselves against overreaching government than he is of the overreach itself. He worries, for example, about cellphones designed and sold by Apple Inc. that are said to be capable of avoiding detection by law enforcement.



“The notion that we would market devices that would allow someone to place themselves beyond the law, troubles me a lot,” Comey said in an interview that aired Sunday on *60 Minutes*. He added,

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As a country, I don’t know why we would want to put people beyond the law.

That is, sell cars with trunks that couldn’t ever be opened by law enforcement with a court order, or sell an apartment that could never be entered even by law enforcement. Would you want to live in that neighborhood? This is a similar concern.

The notion that people have devices, again, that with court orders — based on a showing of probable cause in a case involving kidnapping or child exploitation or terrorism — we could never open that phone? My sense is that we’ve gone too far when we’ve gone there.

Well, as Private First Class Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C. might say, “Gol-lee!” Maybe citizens are trying to protect themselves against a government gone too far. And which is the greater danger to our lives and liberties? I do not fear my neighbor who has a cellphone that can’t be tapped or otherwise messed with so government snoops might listen to his calls. I do mind if government is listening to my calls, or attaching a device to my automobile to keep track of where I go and when.

But let us return to Comey’s premise that produced the headline. “I believe that Americans should be deeply skeptical of government power,” the FBI chief told Scott Pelley of CBS News. “You cannot trust people in power.”



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Well, that made me think of a friend who during the run-up to the great Bush War II in Iraq, swallowed the Bush administration line and then some. I asked him why he thought we should go to war in Iraq. “Because I believe my government!” was his incredible, credulous answer.

But hasn’t our government often lied to us? Let me try to count the ways.

First, I’m willing to cut my friend some slack because he was two years old (I was 14) when President Eisenhower lied to us and to the world in 1960 about the U-2 surveillance flights over Russia. (The cover story was that a weather plane was blown off course. Khrushchev said he didn’t know CIA Director Allen Dulles had such an interest in the weather.) And he was still in the early years of grade school when the Vietnam fiasco blew up into a full-scale war. But he told me he had read *The Best and the Brightest* by David Halberstam. So he should know how phony the Gulf of Tonkin “provocation” was. At the time members of Congress believed their government and passed a resolution that the government prevaricators later claimed was the “functional equivalent” of a declaration of war.

If my friend read through the entire book, he should have some recollection of how our government lied to us again and again and again during the Vietnam War. And he might know that while our U.S. military “advisors” were putting their lives on the line to save the anti-communist government in Saigon, JFK and U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge conspired to support the coup that ousted (and assassinated) President Diem and his brother. (Whether they deserved it is another subject for another time.) So I wonder: Should we believe the Warren Commission version of President Kennedy’s assassination, despite all the “inconsistencies” — to put it kindly?

We might remember LBJ telling us in 1964 that American boys were not going to be sent 10,000 miles from home to fight a war Asian boys should be fighting.

There is strong evidence the Nixon campaign during the election season of 1968 [worked to sabotage the Vietnam peace talks](#), fearful as they were that an outbreak of peace in Vietnam before the November election in the United States would turn the voting public in favor of Humphrey. There is also evidence the Reagan camp did the same in 1980 concerning a negotiated end to the Iran hostage crisis.

There were the secret bombings in Laos and Cambodia during the presidency of Richard Nixon and Dr. Strangelove (Kissinger: “The illegal we do at once. The unconstitutional takes a little longer.”)

Um — were there any lies involved in Watergate? Oh, my! Should we believe our government when its chief executive had a team of plumbers that, among other things, broke into the office of Daniel Ellsberg’s psychiatrist? Should we believe a president of the United States [who said](#) (after leaving office), “When the president does it, that means it’s not illegal”?

Do we remember all the subterfuge and deception that went on with the Iran-Contra arms for hostages deals?

Did the government my friend believes so readily have a president who declared, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky”?

Do we remember the Year 2000 campaign and which candidate said he was opposed to nation-building and wanted the United States to have a “more humble” role in the world?

Do we recall that the same candidate said, “I won’t grow the government the way he [Vice Predator Gore] will”?

Do we remember a Republican Party that promised, in one election after another, to do away with the departments of Energy and Education — and never had any intention of getting rid of either?



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Remember the No Child Left Behind Act and the massive increase in spending for the Department of Education under a Republican administration and a GOP Congress? And George W. Bush's Dizzy Dean question: "Is our children learning?"

And then there was the certainty that Iraq had those "weapons of mass destruction." And when the inspectors went back in and didn't find them, Bush/Cheney took the country to war anyway.

More of the same with Nobel Peace Prize-winning President Barack O'Bomber: The accusation was that Syria used chemical weapons against the rebels, crossing Obama's "red line." There have been conflicting accusations and evidence about [which side actually let loose the poison gas](#). Recall George W. Bush's denial that the United States was torturing people. Remember Abu Ghraib? As Joe Sobran [wrote at the time](#), it threatened to undo "all the good will we've so painstakingly built up by bombing Arab cities and starving Arab children,"

And that doesn't even begin to take into account FDR's perfidy, which was before even my time, but it's part of history.

Then there was Truman claiming the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was aimed at [a military target](#) to keep civilian deaths at a minimum.

And Truman claiming the fighting in Korea was not a war. It was a "police action." (How believable was that?)

Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers engineered the coup in Iran that overthrew the democratically elected government in Tehran and put the Shah on the "Peacock Throne."

The same took part in the overthrow and assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo.

My friend has accused me of distorting the facts, building straw men, and taking things out of context. So I challenge him or anyone reading this to go ahead: Straighten out the alleged distortions. Shoot down the alleged straw men. Provide some context for all this.

I suggest a context: Governments lie. The U.S. government no less than others. They depend on citizens' gullibility to remain in power and hold on to an appearance — an illusion, really — of credibility.

I suggest my friend and others read or reread the story of the *Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen. Then read poor duped General Powell's testimony about Iraq and the "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. And believe your own eyes instead of government lies.



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