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BUSH'S REMARKS ON POW-MIA DAY BREAK NEW GROUND

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Virginia Veterans (and Military Retirees) for Bush

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It was no accident that Texas Governor George W. Bush used the term "prisoners" alongside the word "missing" in his speech before the Veterans Museum and Memorial in San Diego on September 15 (National POW/MIA Recognition Day.)

For eight years, the Clinton-Gore administration, and its front office appointees at the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) have virtually eliminated the term "POW" from the official lexicon, purposefully burying the mystery of America's "unrepatriated POWs" under the more politically advantageous term "MIAs," or missing in action.

As a former POW (not MIA) Special Investigator and retired CIA Clandestine Service officer with insights into the programs, operations, and modus operandi of the Soviet KGB and its communist allies counterparts, I have been trying to educate POW and MIA families, politicians, and concerned veterans about the difference between combatants who were killed in battle (MIAs) versus those who were captured alive, secretly held without full knowledge of the U.S., and not returned to America after the conflicts ended.

If an adversary nation holds an American serviceman as a prisoner, then that man is a "Prisoner of War" or POW, whether we know his true status or not. He is not technically or literally an MIA, because the "other side" knows he is not missing. Even if that POW dies in captivity, and is thus can be accounted for by the enemy, he does not then become an MIA. He becomes a dead POW. The enemy government can account for him. 9000 Unrepatriated American POWs from 20th Century conflicts fall into that category.

The POW versus MIA status is a critical distinction. Governor Bush and his key aides have listened to recent input on this matter provided by myself and others for the Governor's background and consideration. The Governor is aware that equal and dedicated special attention must be given to a competent, professional investigation leading to a full accounting of our Unrepatriated POWs, just as was done for remains recovery efforts for MIAs who fell on the battlefield, not as prisoners, but as combat casualties.

The difference as to why the POWs have been ignored, and the MIAs attended to, is that our foreign adversaries have been offered financial incentives to help U.S. teams dig up the remains of service personnel killed in combat. President Clinton's announced trip to Vietnam, after the election, is part of the economic payoff involved for this "half" of the accounting equation. This has not been a full accounting under Clinton-Gore. It is a "half-accounting" at best.

The other side of the coin, the POW side, is far more embarrassing to The governments and intelligence services of Russia, China, North Korean, Vietnam, and even former Warsaw Pact countries. Nearly all of them, to one extent or another, were involved in secret exploitation of American and other foreign POWs. There are still plans on the books of the Russian and Chinese services to resurface these programs, which the

Bolsheviks first used against American troops in 1918, in future wars against NATO or the U.S.

What happened to past Unrepatriated POWs is a matter of national honor. It is a source of concern for the welfare of our future combatants. In 1997, I and the Executive Director of the Joint U.S.-Russian Commission Support Directorate, Mr. Norm Kass, provided Vice President Al Gore with an opportunity to see the distinction and act on it. We did this through his senior military aide in a private meeting. Mr. Gore failed the test. The Vice President never responded, which clearly demonstrated his indifference and lack of caring regarding the POW issue.

By contrast, Governor Bush responded with a clear signal that he heard what was said, understands the distinction, and plans to do something about it once he is in office. He did so in both public, and private, channels.

As to what needs to be done in the future, he had an additional message, which was equally intentional and with purpose as was his use of the term "prisoner." He stated "First, should I be elected president, I will direct all relevant departments and agencies to make it their own priority. Second, I will work with Congress to provide all the necessary resources to carry out that mission."

That is a clear signal, and a reaction to special background provided to him, that priorities will change in a Bush administration to make sure that the accounting is indeed "full," rather than "half." The accounting will include the unaccounted-for POWs, not just combat fatalities which constitute the MIAs.

Governor Bush's remarks, and the access channels that he has allowed to be opened to him and senior advisors, represent the best opportunity in three decades for competent and professional investigations to be applied to the mysteries surrounding an estimated 9000 unrepatriated POWs from the North Russia Expedition (1918), Depression Era Soviet retention of American agents (1930s), 7000 Americans transferred from the German Stalags to the Soviet Gulag for permanent holding (1945), 2000 Americans transferred to Siberia from North Korea and China (1950-1953), Cold War shootdowns (1948-1962), and the First and Second Indochina Wars (1954-1975).

As in so many other problem areas, one has to ask, "Where was Al Gore during the last eight years?" Why are things that never concerned him then, suddenly at the top of his rhetoric? We know the reasons, and it is time for him to go. Integrity, honor, dignity, and character counts as much as the issues they affect. Veterans, military retirees, and people in uniform need to cast their votes for a new Commander-and-Chief that does not include the Clinton-Gore team.

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