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NATIONAL SECURITY, TEXAS-STYLE: WAR ON THE ROCKS TEAMS UP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

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Since our country was founded, we were on the way to Texas — we just didn't know it.

We all know that in 1776, a group of patriots convened in Philadelphia to declare that Britain's 13 American colonies were breaking free from monarchical tyranny. This was the result, in part, of a series of

unwise decisions by King George III that, over time, alienated leading Americans from the British crown.

In that same year, about a thousand miles to the west, agents of another monarch were making what would prove to be another series of unwise decisions.

Don Francisco Boulogny was the Spanish military commander overseeing Alta Luisiana, or Upper Louisiana, in modern-day Missouri. Spain held these territories — having inherited them from France in the last decade — and dominated the Mississippi River. But the Spaniards faced a serious problem: These lands were sparsely populated by Europeans (and most of them spoke French), and a wave of Anglo-Saxons was moving inexorably westward towards the Mississippi. Boulogny had a plan. As T. R. Fehrenbach writes:

If the east bank became solidly English, Boulogny argued, the English would eventually dominate the country. His purpose was to suck all the new settlement west of the river, under the Spanish flag. Spain would have to allow freedom from restriction and give liberal grants of land. The price the immigrants would have to pay would be loyalty to Spain.

Boulogny's plan was approved by the governor, and the Anglo-Saxons — many of them, at the time, Tories — were allowed to settle freely. This policy was sealed by a royal edict less than a decade later, and by 1787 Spanish authorities were actively recruiting Americans to settle in Missouri with generous offers of title and land. The full story is beyond the remit of this article, but it is worth noting that in 1798, the Spanish crown granted over 4,000 acres to a man named Moses Austin.

Over 20 years later, Missouri was in American hands, having passed briefly back into French possession. Moses' son Stephen — under an agreement with Spanish authorities — led 300 families to start what would be the first permanent English-speaking settlement in Texas. The violence and tumult of this period (the details of which are beyond the scope of this article, but offer a fascinating if sometimes gruesome story) left Texas thinly populated and in need of fresh settlers.

Mexico won its independence from Spain during the families' journey. Their settlement arrangement held under the new regime, but only for a few years. Mexican authorities realized the Anglo-Americans had built a robust parallel civil administration, posing a threat to Mexican control over Texas. This led eventually to war, and Austin played a leading role in the Texas Revolution before he died in 1836. Texas was an independent country for nearly a decade, and its independent streak — what later became known as the "Texas Way" — was embedded firmly in its DNA. Still, it was always closely tied to American political ideals. The Texas Declaration of Independence, signed in 1836, stated that the Anglo-Americans of Texas had settled there to "enjoy that constitutional liberty and republican government to which they had been habituated in the land of their birth, the United States of America."

Of course, the U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845 was the key event that set off the Mexican-American War, the end of which left the United States over 500,000 square miles larger. The San Jacinto Monument commemorates the battle of the same name, which was the decisive meeting of force in the Texan fight for independence from Mexico. The inscription on that monument is notable:

Measured by its results, San Jacinto was one of the decisive battles of the world. The freedom of Texas from Mexico won here led to annexation and to the Mexican-American War, resulting in the acquisition by the United States of the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma. Almost one-third of the present area of the American Nation, nearly a million square miles of territory, changed sovereignty.

We were always on our way to Texas, and that journey changed the country forever.

That journey didn't end, of course, in the 19th century. We can easily see, in more recent history, how Texas has changed and continues to change not just the country, but the world. Perhaps the most notable place to turn is the shale oil fields of Texas, where we've seen brash innovation revolutionize the global energy industry.

The shale gas and oil revolution has transformed the world's energy landscape. George Mitchell, a Texas oilman, was one of this revolution's founding fathers. As discussed in Russell Gold's book [The Boom](#), Mitchell Energy began trying to extract gas trapped in the Barnett Shale — a large shale formation located in north-central Texas — in 1982, but nothing they tried was working. In 1995, 31-year old [Nick Steinsberger](#) got a promotion at Mitchell Energy and was put in charge of the Barnett Shale. The company was on the verge of shutting down its operations there. But Steinsberger happened upon a [simple but counter-intuitive series of innovations](#) that made fracking profitable and worthwhile. Between Steinsberger's discoveries and Mitchell's tenacity in the face of illness and financial hardship, the company was saved. In 2001, Mitchell Energy sold for \$3.1 billion.

The innovations did not end there. Midsized American companies that drill for oil and gas — dubbed the “independents” by Gold — have continued to innovate and innovate, making fracking globally competitive and [defeating all efforts by OPEC to put a stop to it](#). In Texas and elsewhere, producers [survived and even thrived](#) when prices plummeted. Fracking now dominates U.S. [oil](#) and [gas](#) output. And it is no surprise that the [Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas](#) is at the cutting edge of helping us understand these transformations and the future of the energy industry.

The rich soil of Texas has also given us many presidents and national security leaders of great consequence, including George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, Claire Chennault, Chester Nimitz, and James Baker. I'll focus on three here: Lyndon B. Johnson, Robert Strauss, and William P. Clements. Indeed, it's not surprising that their names adorn existing University of Texas institutions.

President Johnson is obviously the best known of the three. His most famous — or perhaps infamous — defense and foreign policy legacy is his handling of the Vietnam War. Indeed, that issue more than any other made him [decide not to run for re-election](#). But Vietnam should not define Johnson's entire foreign policy legacy. For example, Johnson was instrumental in the Outer Space Treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the keen diplomacy that followed the 1967 Six Day War. UT-Austin, of course, is the home of the [Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs](#) as well as the [LBJ Presidential Library](#).

When Robert S. Strauss passed away three years ago, he was [remembered](#) as a [consummate Texan](#) and deal-maker. In his own words, he was a “[centrist, a worker, a doer, a putter-together](#).” The tremendous respect he commanded on both sides of the aisle can be hard for us to relate to in our present era of divided politics, but that makes his life and career more important for us to learn from now than ever before. In 1945, Strauss founded Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, one of the world's top law firms. He served as chairman of the Democratic National Committee in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Strauss was the only person who could look President Ronald Reagan in the eye and tell him what the Iran-Contra Scandal was doing to his administration and what he could do to fix it. When Nancy Reagan called him up to ask him to intervene, Strauss responded, “[Why? Does he want to hear the truth?](#) If not, I'm not coming.”

In 1991, he was appointed by President George H.W. Bush as ambassador to the Soviet Union. When the

president told Strauss he wanted to appoint him, he responded, “Hell, Mr. President, I didn’t even vote for you. You don’t want me.” Bush’s response made it clear that this only burnished Strauss’ credentials even more:

Well, you just blew it, Strauss...You are the only person since I have been President who sat in that chair at this desk and looked me in the face and said he didn’t vote for me. Now a lot of them sat there and said they did. I know that, but you are the only one who had enough guts to say he didn’t and do it with a smile.

Strauss’ tenure coincided with unprecedented political upheaval as the Cold War finally shuddered to a halt and he served as the first American ambassador to the Russian Federation. This giant of the 20th century is remembered in many ways, not least in the form of [UT-Austin’s Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law](#). This center is led by Robert Chesney, one of the Texas National Security Network’s directors.

[William Perry Clements](#), Jr. is another figure who represents much of what Texas stands for: grit, determination, self-reliance, patriotism, and innovation. Seventeen-year old William was set to go off to college when his father lost his job. This was during the Great Depression, and [young William had to go to work](#) to help his family. He worked as a roughneck and driller on the East Texas oil field. He eventually was able to study engineering, then returned to the oil industry. In 1947, he founded the Southeastern Drilling Company, which became one of the largest of its kind. He later served as deputy secretary of defense during the Nixon and Ford administrations. During his tenure, he was instrumental in the development of what remain some of the most important weapons systems in the U.S. arsenal to this day: the F-15, the F-16, the Aegis-class Cruiser, the Tomahawk cruise missile, and the M-1 Abrams tank.

Then came another triumph: In 1978, he ran for governor and won, serving as the state’s first Republican governor since Reconstruction. He was defeated for re-election in 1982, but mounted an amazing comeback in the 1986 election. More than any other figure, he transformed Texas politics. Just like Strauss, his legacy lives on in many forms, one of which is the [Clements Center for National Security](#) at UT-Austin, led by William Inboden, who is also co-director of the Texas National Security Network.

The Texas National Security Network

As you can see by looking at our homepage today, something is different about *War on the Rocks*. Ours is a publication that surveyed the landscape and thought things could and should be done differently. We have our own way of doing what we do — an independent streak that we share with Stephen F. Austin and his contemporaries. It’s therefore natural that we should join forces with an institution that represents the best of Texas — The University of Texas System.

In 2015, Adm. (ret.) Bill McRaven, the Chancellor of The University of Texas, announced eight quantum leaps, one of which was the establishment of the Texas National Security Network. This effort aims, [in McRaven’s words](#), “to make the University of Texas System the leading university system in the world for teaching and research on national security.”

The Network encompasses a range of activities from new faculty positions to conferences to bold research agendas, and incorporates the entire University of Texas System. In Washington, we tend to hear most about what is happening in Austin, but there are important national security-relevant programs at the system’s other institutions. Policymakers and national security wonks take note: If you’re not from Texas and you haven’t been paying attention, there is a lot more going on there than you think. Here is just a

sampling:

UT-San Antonio has a [world-class cyber-security program](#) and hosts three cyber research centers: the [Center for Infrastructure Assurance and Security](#), the [Institute for Cyber Security](#) and the [Center for Education and Research in Information and Infrastructure Security](#). UT-Dallas hosts the [Cyber Security Research and Education Institute](#). Since 2004, UT-Dallas has been a National Center of Excellence in information assurance education and research as well as cyber operations.

The University of Texas Medical Branch is one of eight institutions selected by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to host a Regional Center of Excellence for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases Research. In 2003, as a part of this venture, the [UTMB Center for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases](#) (CBEID) was launched and the NIH funded a national biocontainment laboratory in Galveston. This institution is at the center of efforts to protect the United States from biological weapons.

Finally, UT-El Paso hosts the [National Security Studies Institute](#), which is a U.S. intelligence community Center for Academic Excellence. This institute hosts the Center for Intelligence and Security Research and the Intelligence and National Security Studies program. Both are working to foster and educate the next generation of intelligence professionals.

Where Does ***War on the Rocks*** Fit In?

The Texas National Security Network also includes a special, long-term collaboration with *War on the Rocks*. Think of us as the Washington-based action arm of the Texas National Security Network. At the center of this collaboration is a new journal: the *Texas National Security Review*. This forthcoming publication will feature both peer-reviewed scholarly work and contributions by policymakers and practitioners. Its academic articles will be peer-reviewed (double-blind), rigorous, interdisciplinary, and accessible and useful for decision-makers.

The new journal's articles by policymakers and national security practitioners will represent the best of *War on the Rocks* and professional journals, in long-form and footnoted, but still totally accessible.

The print edition will come out quarterly and will be made available *online, for free, for everyone*. No more gates between the public and knowledge. The online edition will also feature roundtable-style debates, discussions, and book reviews.

This does not mean that The University of Texas endorses everything or anything published in *War on the Rocks* or the forthcoming *Texas National Security Review*. We remain an independently owned and operated media outlet. In fact, one of the reasons that The University of Texas was keen to join forces with *War on the Rocks* is the strength of its brand and our willingness to rock the boat.

Moving Ahead with the Mission in Mind

This Saturday, I will quietly mark the fourth birthday of *War on the Rocks*. [On our third birthday](#), I wrote that I was intent on showing the world that it was possible to build a media organization that could thrive from a business perspective without compromising one bit on quality. This collaboration and partnership with the University of Texas is a boon to the War on the Rocks mission to force the sort of strategic conversation that we all deserve, including and especially those at the tip of the spear who have been asked and ordered to do so much in this young century. Thanks for traveling this road with us. I am honored to have you along for the journey.

Ryan Evans is the founder and editor-in-chief of War on the Rocks.



Commentary

MARINE CORPS AVIATION: LET THE "GUARDIAN ANGEL" BE YOUR MONEYBALL AND THE VMUS YOUR OAKLAND A'S



Commentary

LEADERSHIP IN THE AIR: THE FIGHTER PILOT, PART I



Commentary

THE NUCLEAR BAN TREATY IS WAY OFF TARGET

We have retired our comments section, but if you want to talk to other members of the natsec community about War on the Rocks articles, the War Hall is the place for you. Check out our membership at

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