

Drift by Rachel Maddow

Mary Ann McGivern | May. 11, 2012 NCR Today

Most of my professional life I've been tracking military spending. I know who lobbies for foreign arms sales, where the cost overruns are, why weapons we don't need keep getting built.

But until I read Rachel Maddow's *Drift* I didn't think much about successful strategies to make an end run around the Constitution so it would be easier to go to war. That's the thesis of Maddow's book.

Maddow starts with Lyndon Johnson's refusal to call up the National Guard so that American families would not feel the pain of war. She spends a lot of time looking at Ronald Reagan's "arms for hostages" and support of the Contras in Nicaragua. I lived through these times and was actively opposed to Johnson's and Reagan's policies. But I didn't remember them and I certainly didn't understand them in the context of the Constitution.

I do remember Representative Ron Dellums' lawsuit against George H.W. Bush, demanding that he take his case for the Gulf War to Congress. But again, Bill Clinton's use of contractors in the Balkans passed me by.

Maddow is a clear and witty writer, and she is bipartisan in her critique. She is not a conspiracy theorist. She sees these presidents as true believers in their own goals and in their own power as president. They were not deliberately subverting the Constitution. But that's what they did.

She comes to the same conclusions I do about how wasteful our military spending is. But her path is new. It's an easy read on an urgent topic. Our Constitution makes it difficult to go to war. That's how it should be.

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