

SPECIAL REPORTS

How our governments use terrorism to control us

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The sponsorship of terrorism by western governments, targeting their own populations, has been a taboo subject. Although major scandals have received cursory coverage in the media, the subject has been allowed to immediately disappear without discussion or investigation. Therefore the appearance this year of two major studies of this subject is a welcome breakthrough, and provides essential reading for anyone struggling to understand the events of September 11, 2001 and the post September 11 world.

The studies are complementary. *NATO's Secret Armies, Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe* by Daniele Ganser concerns terrorism sponsored by American and British intelligence in Western Europe and Turkey between the end of World War II and 1985. *The War on Truth, 9/11, Disinformation, and the Anatomy of Terrorism* by Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed chronicles the cultivation and sponsorship of militant Islamic terrorism by the intelligence services of the United States, Britain and Russia from 1979 to the present. Both studies are models of scholarship -- meticulously documented and carefully reasoned -- but the world they reveal will boggle the mind of the most wild-eyed conspiracy theorist.

Creating "Communist" Terrorism to Fuel the Cold War

NATO's Secret Armies describes how following World War II the US and Britain, fearing a Soviet invasion of Europe, established "stay-behind" paramilitary units throughout Western Europe and in Turkey. Had the anticipated Soviet invasion occurred these units would have constituted ready made resistance groups, trained and armed, with secure communications with each other and with their allies in Britain and the US. In some countries, for example Norway and Sweden, these stay-behind units were true to their original charters, remaining inactive until they disbanded at the end of the Cold War. In other countries, however, the paramilitary units were activated by their handlers in the United States as part of a hellish "Strategy of Tension" designed to convince left-leaning populations in Italy, Germany, Belgium, Greece, Turkey and other countries that their very lives were at risk from communist terrorists. The arms and bombs originally intended for the Soviets were turned instead on their own compatriots with the aim of placing the blame for the waves of terrorist attacks on communists.

In Italy the stay-behind operation was referred to as Gladio (Latin for "Sword"). The Piazza Fontana bombings that killed 16 and wounded 80 shortly before Christmas in 1969 initiated a wave of terrorist bombings in Italy by Gladio operatives that continued throughout the 1970s. The worst single bombing occurred in the Bologna train station in 1980, killing 85 and wounding 200. Another Gladio bombing in Brescia in 1974 killed eight and wounded 102, and the same year a train was bombed in Rome, killing 12 and wounding 48. The case that led to the discovery of the Gladio plots by the Italian courts was a 1972 bombing that killed three policemen.

The Gladio operations in Italy are relatively well known and well understood because of several high level judicial investigations that received coverage in the European press and have been the subject of a few books. One contribution of Ganser's book is to bring this material together in a concise and well organised format. Further, Ganser extends his study beyond Italy to examine the effects of stay-behind operations throughout Western Europe and in Turkey.

I was quite surprised to learn that by far the most extensive and destructive stay-behind operations were those carried out in Turkey under the code name Counter-Guerrilla. Among other crimes, a long series of bombings, random killings and assassinations, covertly perpetrated by CIA-controlled Counter-Guerrilla operatives in the late 1970s, were used as a pretext for the military coup in 1980 that led to the installation of a pro-American and pro-Israeli government there. I was also shocked to learn that stay-behind operatives were responsible for a series of horrific terrorist attacks in Belgium as late in the Cold War as 1985, although this is still the subject of unconvincing official denials.

One limitation of Ganser's study, which he frequently laments, is the unavailability of official documentation because all materials relating to the stay-behind operations remain highly classified. All Freedom of Information Act requests to date have been denied by American authorities. One might have hoped that at least with the end of the Cold War such atrocious strategies would be renounced, and that the implicated governments would make every effort to come clean and ensure that this history would not be repeated. Unfortunately, as *The War on Truth* by Nafeez Ahmed makes clear, the Strategy of Tension has proved to be so useful a tool both in terms of global and domestic politics that, far from being abandoned, these despicable operations have become increasingly accepted and commonplace.

Creating "Islamic" Terrorism for the Post-Cold War Era

Ahmed's study centres on the attacks of September 11, 2001, but the story begins in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet

invasion in 1979. Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter at the time, has described in an interview how, even prior to the invasion, the US had taken steps to fund the Mujahedeen warlords and to inflame militant Islam in the region. The aim was to destabilise the region and to force the Soviets to invade -- to draw them into their own Vietnam-style quagmire.

According to Brzezinski, "We did not push the Russians into invading, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would. That secret operation was an excellent idea. The effect was to draw the Russians into the Afghan trap."

After the Soviets' inglorious retreat from Afghanistan, and even more so after the collapse of the Soviet Union several years later, the policy of inflaming and exploiting militant Islam was credited by many in the US national security establishment for these historic developments. Ahmed has compiled irrefutable evidence that the United States did not abandon the militant Islamists after the end of the Cold War. In fact, American leadership at the very highest levels has continued to covertly protect, assist and guide militant Islam in general and al-Qaeda in particular in geopolitically important areas around the world, including Central Asia, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Philippines.

It is impossible to do justice to Ahmed's densely packed 390-page presentation here, but I will give some representative examples.

Sergeant Ali Mohamed Joins al-Qaeda

Ali Mohamed, an Egyptian intelligence officer, was fired in 1984 because of his religious extremism. In spite of this and in spite of the fact that his name was on the State Department's terrorist watch list, he was granted a visa to enter the US and became a US citizen. By 1986 he was a sergeant in the US Army and an instructor at the elite Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. While in this position Mohamed travelled to Afghanistan to meet with bin Laden, and he assisted with the training of al-Qaeda operatives both in Afghanistan and in the US. His immediate supervisors at Fort Bragg were duly alarmed by these illegal activities, and reported them up the chain of command. When their reports failed to produce any action, not even an official debriefing of Mohamed upon his return from Afghanistan, at least one of his supervisors, Lt. Col. Robert Anderson, concluded that Mohamed had been acting as part of an operation sanctioned by an American intelligence agency, "probably the CIA."

Mohamed's activities in support of al-Qaeda throughout the 1990s were of the highest significance to that organisation. In 1991, he handled security for bin Laden's move from Saudi Arabia to the Sudan. In 1993, Mohamed accompanied bin Laden's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, on a fund raising tour of the United States, again handling security arrangements. The funds raised helped support Zawahiri in a Pentagon supported mission in the Balkans, which will be discussed in the next section.

The al-Qaeda members trained by Mohamed in the United States included several who were later convicted in connection with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Top secret US Army training manuals supplied by Mohamed to the defendants were produced as evidence at their trial.

Mohamed himself did the initial surveillance for the al-Qaeda bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. At the time Mohamed was on active reserve with the Special Forces and was a paid FBI informant. Mohamed was at long last charged with crimes in connection with the 1998 embassy bombings. In October 2000, he was convicted of five counts of conspiracy to murder nationals of the United States. However, the nature of Mohamed's plea agreement, the sentence handed down, if any, and Mohamed's present whereabouts remain secret.

The Pentagon Brings al-Qaeda to the Balkans

The US national security establishment did not miss a beat in seeking to replicate the triumph in Afghanistan in other geopolitically critical areas. The Soviet puppet regime fell in Afghanistan in February 1992. That same year, the Pentagon started importing Afghan jihadists organised by bin Laden into Bosnia to wreak chaos and fuel the civil wars between Muslims and Serbs that devastated the former Yugoslavia in the following years. Bin Laden's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, served as commander of the Mujahedeen forces in the Balkans.

The role of the Pentagon in airlifting the Mujahedeen terrorists into Bosnia and Kosovo between 1992 to 1995 has been well documented and widely reported in the European and Canadian media, but almost completely ignored in the United States. However, the geopolitical advantages of breaking the former sovereign nation of Yugoslavia into a patchwork of NATO protectorates, under the firm control of the United States, did not go unnoted. *New Republic* editors Jacob Heilbrunn and Michael Lind celebrated the event in a *New York Times* article titled "The Third American Empire" published on January 2, 1996:

"Instead of seeing Bosnia as the eastern frontier of NATO, we should view the Balkans as the western frontier of America's rapidly expanding sphere of influence in the Middle East . . . The regions once ruled by the Ottoman Turks show signs of becoming the heart of a third American empire . . . The main purpose of NATO countries, for the foreseeable future, will be to serve as staging areas for American wars in the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf."

The CIA Brings al-Qaeda to the Philippines

In 1991, with the Afghan War winding down, the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group was formed in the Philippines around a core of radical Afghan veterans. They conducted their first kidnapping operation in 1992, and were responsible for a series of bombings and kidnappings throughout the 1990s that were highly destabilising for the Philippine government. Several high level al-Qaeda operatives, including Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed were involved. Funding was provided by one of bin Laden's brothers in law, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, an important figure in the funding of al-Qaeda operations worldwide.

Ahmed cites many authoritative sources, including Philippine intelligence officer Rene Jarque, Lt. Col. Ricardo Morales, and Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel, to show that the Abu-Sayyaf group has received special assistance and protection both from the Philippine military and from the United States. Pimentel in a speech before the Philippine Senate in July of 2000 accused the CIA of creating the terrorist organisation with the help of their contacts in the Philippine military and intelligence communities.

Two incidents in particular have exposed the connivance of the United States in the Abu Sayyaf reign of terror beyond a reasonable doubt. In December of 1994, Khalifa was arrested during a visit to San Francisco on immigration violations. The FBI was aware of his ties to the Abu Sayyaf group and to al-Qaeda, and began a criminal investigation. Khalifa's lawyers tried to stall the investigation and manoeuvre for extradition to Jordan. Incredibly, help came to Khalifa from on high. Secretary of State Warren Christopher personally wrote a three-page letter to Attorney General Janet Reno asking that the request for extradition be granted. Accordingly, the FBI investigation was cancelled and Khalifa was sent to Jordan per his own request, where he was soon a free man.

The second incident is even more extraordinary and revealing. Michael Meiring, an American citizen, arrived in the Philippines in 1992 and promptly formed close working relationships both with high government officials and with rebel leaders in the Abu Sayyaf group. In 2002, in the midst of a wave of Abu Sayyaf bombings, Meiring accidentally detonated a bomb in his own hotel room in Mindao causing grave injury to himself, requiring emergency hospitalisation. US authorities immediately intervened. FBI agents and "agents of the National Security Council" swept him away from his hospital room, first to a hospital in Manila where Meiring was kept incommunicado and was treated by a doctor hand-picked by the US embassy. Then Meiring was rushed back to the United States. Like Ali Mohamed, his fate and current whereabouts are unknown. Numerous attempts to have him extradited back to the Philippines for prosecution have been stonewalled by US authorities.

The motivations for American support of terrorism in the Philippines are not hard to guess. In 1991, the same year that Abu Sayyaf was formed, the Philippines Senate had voted to close all US military bases in their country, an action with profound implications for the military posture of the United States in South Asia. In 2002, due to the destabilising effects of the Abu Sayyaf operations, the US military were invited back into the country to participate in operation Balikatan ("shoulder to shoulder"), a joint US/Philippine military exercise purportedly aimed at eliminating terrorism. These operations required special exemptions from the Philippine Constitution, which forbids foreign armies from operating on Philippine soil. Once again, al-Qaeda, with the help of their American friends, had acted to advance the geostrategic interests of the United States.

The Grand Design

The above examples are by no means isolated anomalies. The bulk of Ahmed's fine book is devoted to recording a pattern of evidence that is finally overwhelming. As he says in conclusion, "not only does the strategy employed in the new 'War on Terror' seem to provoke terrorism, but an integral dimension of the strategy is the protection of key actors culpable in the financial, logistical, and military-intelligence support of international terrorism."

And Then There Is September 11 Itself . . .

But what about the September 11 attacks themselves? Were they "blowback," i.e., unintended domestic consequences of foreign covert operations, or were they an integral part of the Strategy of Tension? Based in part on an analysis of intelligence warnings of the attacks, and on the absence of any air defence response, Ahmed strongly endorses the latter view. He reviews the dozens of very specific foreign and domestic intelligence warnings of terrorist attacks in the United States using airliners that came in the months leading up to the attacks. These in turn led to warnings issued by American intelligence to Pentagon officials, and to others, including author Salman Rushdie and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, to cancel all flight plans on the day of September 11, 2001. Meanwhile, no action whatsoever was taken to warn or to protect the American public.

Ahmed points out that the responsible authorities at the Pentagon and the Federal Aviation Administration have produced several profoundly contradictory accounts of their own actions on that day -- each subsequent story seemingly an attempt to remedy the shortcomings of a previous one. And still no remotely satisfactory account of the failure to intercept even one of the four hijacked airliners has been produced. Under ordinary circumstances, interception of wayward aircraft by military fighters would have been absolutely routine; such interceptions occurred at least 56 times in the calendar year prior to September 11, 2001. Ahmed points out that the attacks were allowed to proceed "entirely unhindered for over one and one half hours in the most restricted airspace in the world." He finds the idea that this was

due to negligence beyond belief. Instead he argues that there must have been a deliberate stand-down of the air defence system managed by senior national security officials including the vice president and the secretary of defense.

The Future of the Strategy of Tension

The books reviewed herein document a continuous history over the last 40 years of the United States and other governments fostering and manipulating terrorism for their own ends. Terrorist organisations have been used to destabilise inconvenient regimes around the world, and to sow chaos, which can then serve as a pretext for military intervention.

Even more importantly, terrorism is used to create a crisis atmosphere at home under cover of which the crimes and corruption of government officials go unpunished, civil liberties are easily abandoned, and major wars can be launched under false pretences. Although at present there appears to be no reason for the terror-masters in Washington to consider changing their tactics, the publication this year of these two illuminating books raises the hope that the Strategy of Tension, which can only thrive in darkness and confusion, will ultimately have to be abandoned.

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Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *The War on Truth, 9/11, Disinformation, and the Anatomy of Terrorism*, Olive Branch Press, An imprint of Interlink Publishing, 2005, Northampton, MA

Daniele Ganser, *NATO's Secret Armies, Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe*, Frank Cass, 2005, London and New York

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