

The West's Help to Islamic Jihadists

Though Western leaders now lock arms in disgust over Islamic fundamentalism, the West's actions from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama have often promoted the interests of jihadists from Afghanistan in the 1980s to Iraq in the 2000s to Libya and Syria in the 2010s, as William Blum recalls.

By William Blum

After Paris, condemnation of religious fanaticism is at its height. I'd guess that even many progressives fantasize about wringing the necks of *jihadists*, bashing into their heads some thoughts about the intellect, about satire, humor, freedom of speech. We're talking here, after all, about young men raised in France, not Saudi Arabia.

Where has all this Islamic fundamentalism come from in this modern age? Most of it comes trained, armed, financed, indoctrinated from Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. During various periods from the 1970s to the present, these four countries had been the most secular, modern, educated, welfare states in the Middle East region. And what had happened to these secular, modern, educated, welfare states?

In the 1980s, the United States overthrew the Afghan government that was progressive, with full rights for women, believe it or not, leading to the creation of the Taliban and their taking power. [U.S. Department of the Army, *Afghanistan, A Country Study* (1986), pp.121, 128, 130, 223, 232]

In the 2000s, the United States overthrew the Iraqi government, destroying not only the secular state, but the civilized state as well, leaving a failed state.

In 2011, the United States and its NATO military machine overthrew the secular Libyan government of Muammar Gaddafi, leaving behind a lawless state and unleashing many hundreds of *jihadists* and tons of weaponry across the Middle East.

And for the past few years the United States has been engaged in overthrowing the secular Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. This, along with the U.S. occupation of Iraq having triggered widespread Sunni-Shia warfare, led to the creation of The Islamic State with all its beheadings and other charming practices.

However, despite it all, the world was made safe for capitalism, imperialism, anti-communism, oil, Israel, and *jihadists*. God is Great!

Starting with the Cold War, and with the above interventions building upon that,

we have 70 years of American foreign policy, without which as Russian/American writer Andre Vltchek has observed “almost all Muslim countries, including Iran, Egypt and Indonesia, would now most likely be socialist, under a group of very moderate and mostly secular leaders.” [*Counterpunch*, Jan. 10, 2015]

Even the ultra-oppressive Saudi Arabia without Washington’s protection would probably be a very different place.

On Jan. 11, Paris was the site of a March of National Unity in honor of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, whose journalists had been assassinated by terrorists. The march was rather touching, but it was also an orgy of Western hypocrisy, with the French TV broadcasters and the assembled crowd extolling without end the NATO world’s reverence for journalists and freedom of speech; an ocean of signs declaring *Je suis Charlie Nous Sommes Tous Charlie*; and flaunting giant pencils, as if pencils not bombs, invasions, overthrows, torture, and drone attacks have been the West’s weapons of choice in the Middle East during the past century.

No reference was made to the fact that the American military, in the course of its wars in recent decades in the Middle East and elsewhere, had been responsible for the deliberate deaths of dozens of journalists.

In Iraq, among other incidents, see *Wikileaks’* 2007 video of the cold-blooded murder of two *Reuters* journalists; the 2003 U.S. air-to-surface missile attack on the offices of *Al Jazeera* in Baghdad that left three journalists dead and four wounded; and the American firing on Baghdad’s Hotel Palestine the same year that killed two foreign cameramen.

Moreover, on Oct. 8, 2001, the second day of the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan, the transmitters for the Taliban government’s *Radio Shari* were bombed and shortly after this the U.S. bombed some 20 regional radio sites. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld defended the targeting of these facilities, saying: “Naturally, they cannot be considered to be free media outlets. They are mouthpieces of the Taliban and those harboring terrorists.” [[Index on Censorship](#), the UK’s leading organization promoting freedom of expression, Oct. 18, 2001]

And in Yugoslavia, in 1999, during the infamous 78-day bombing of a country which posed no threat at all to the United States or any other country, state-owned *Radio Television Serbia* (RTS) was targeted because it was broadcasting *things which the United States and NATO did not like* (like how much horror the bombing was causing). The bombs took the lives of many of the station’s staff, and both legs of one of the survivors, which had to be amputated to free him from the wreckage. [*The Independent* (London), April 24, 1999]

I present here some views on *Charlie Hebdo* sent to me by a friend in Paris who has long had a close familiarity with the publication and its staff:

“On international politics *Charlie Hebdo* was neoconservative. It supported every single NATO intervention from Yugoslavia to the present. They were anti-Muslim, anti-Hamas (or any Palestinian organization), anti-Russian, anti-Cuban (with the exception of one cartoonist), anti-Hugo ChÃavez, anti-Iran, anti-Syria, pro-Pussy Riot, pro-Kiev Do I need to continue?

“Strangely enough, the magazine was considered to be ‘leftist’. It’s difficult for me to criticize them now because they weren’t ‘bad people’, just a bunch of funny cartoonists, yes, but intellectual freewheelers without any particular agenda and who actually didn’t give a fuck about any form of ‘correctness’ political, religious, or whatever; just having fun and trying to sell a ‘subversive’ magazine (with the notable exception of the former editor, Philippe Val, who is, I think, a true-blooded neocon).”

Remember Arseniy Yatsenuk? The Ukrainian whom U.S. State Department officials adopted as one of their own in early 2014 and guided into the position of Prime Minister so he could lead the Ukrainian Forces of Good against Russia in the new Cold War?

In an interview on German television on Jan. 7, 2015, Yatsenuk allowed the following words to cross his lips: “We all remember well the Soviet invasion of Ukraine and Germany. We will not allow that, and nobody has the right to rewrite the results of World War Two.”

The Ukrainian Forces of Good, it should be kept in mind, also include several neo-Nazis in high government positions and many more partaking in the fight against Ukrainian pro-Russians in the south-east of the country. Last June, Yatsenuk referred to these pro-Russians as “sub-humans,” directly equivalent to the Nazi term “*untermenschen*.” [[“Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk talking to Pinar Atalay”](#), Tagesschau (Germany), Jan. 7, 2015 (in Ukrainian with German voice-over)]

So the next time you shake your head at some stupid remark made by a member of the U.S. government, try to find some consolation in the thought that high American officials are not necessarily the dumbest, except of course in their choice of who is worthy of being one of the empire’s partners.

The type of rally held in Paris this month to condemn an act of terror by *jihadists* could as well have been held for the victims of Odessa in Ukraine last May. The same neo-Nazi types referred to above took time off from parading around with their swastika-like symbols and calling for the death of Russians,

Communists and Jews, and burned down a trade-union building in Odessa, killing scores of people and sending hundreds to hospital; many of the victims were beaten or shot when they tried to flee the flames and smoke; ambulances were blocked from reaching the wounded.

Try and find a single American mainstream media entity that has made even a slightly serious attempt to capture the horror. You would have to go to the Russian station in Washington, DC, RT.com, search "Odessa fire" for many stories, images and videos. Also see the [Wikipedia entry on the 2 May 2014 Odessa clashes](#).

If the American people were forced to watch, listen, and read all the stories of neo-Nazi behavior in Ukraine the past few years, I think they yes, even the American people and their less-than-intellectual Congressional representatives would start to wonder why their government was so closely allied with such people. The United States may even go to war with Russia on the side of such people.

L'Occident n'est pas Charlie pour Odessa. Il n'y a pas de d'œfil'œ Å Paris pour Odessa.

William Blum is an author, historian, and renowned critic of U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of [Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II](#) and [Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower](#), among others. [This article originally appeared at the Anti-Empire Report, <http://williamblum.org/> .]

The CIA's Prosecutorial Defense

In the trial of alleged CIA whistleblower Jeffrey Sterling, the U.S. government appears more intent on burnishing the CIA's tarnished reputation than proving Sterling's guilt. The defendant almost looks to be collateral damage in this PR process, as Norman Solomon observes.

By Norman Solomon

Midway through the trial of former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling, one comment stands out: "A criminal case," defense attorney Edward MacMahon told the jury at the outset, "is not a place where the CIA goes to get its reputation back."

But that's where the CIA went with this trial in its first week, sending to the witness stand a procession of officials who attested to the agency's virtues and

fervently decried anyone who might provide a journalist with classified information.

The CIA's reputation certainly needs a lift. It has rolled downhill at an accelerating pace in the dozen years since telling President George W. Bush what he wanted the nation to hear about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. That huge bloody blot on the agency's record has not healed since then, inflamed by such matters as drone strikes, rendition of prisoners to torture-happy regimes and resolute protection of its own torturers.

CIA sensibilities about absolution and prosecution are reflected in the fact that a former head of the CIA's clandestine service, Jose Rodriguez Jr., suffered no penalty for destroying numerous videotapes of torture interrogations by the agency, which knew from the start that the torture was illegal.

But in the courtroom, day after day, with patriotic piety, CIA witnesses, most of them screened from public view to keep their identities secret, have testified to their reverence for legality.

In the process, the CIA is airing soiled threads of its dirty laundry as never before in open court. The agency seems virtually obsessed with trying to refute the negative portrayal of Operation Merlin, the CIA's effort 15 years ago to provide a flawed nuclear weapon design to Iran, in James Risen's 2006 book *State of War*.

To underscore the importance of blocking the information about Operation Merlin that eventually surfaced in the book, Rice testified that, in her role as national security adviser in 2003, she consulted with President Bush and got his approval before meeting with representatives of the *New York Times*. Rice succeeded in persuading the newspaper hierarchy not to publish the story. (Revealing CIA memos about the agency's maneuvers to pressure the *Times* are posted as trial exhibits.)

The star witness at the end of last week, identified as "Mr. Merlin," was the CIA-asset Russian scientist who delivered diagram material for a nuclear weapon component to an Iranian office in Vienna in 2000. Like the CIA officers who testified, he voiced pride in Operation Merlin, at one point even seeming to assert that it had prevented Iran from developing a nuclear bomb. (That was an especially bizarre claim. Mr. Merlin himself admitted that his efforts never got any response from Tehran, and there is no evidence the operation had any nonproliferation effect.)

Contrary to the narrative in *State of War*, which portrays him as very skeptical of the operation and reluctant to participate, Mr. Merlin's testimony via video

aimed to present himself as resolute about executing the plan: "I knew I needed to do my job. . . . I had no doubts."

When the prosecutor asked whether it took a lot of persuading to get him to participate in the operation, Mr. Merlin responded with sudden vehemence: "It was not a rogue operation. It was a brilliant operation." (The chapter in Risen's book detailing Operation Merlin is titled "A Rogue Operation.")

The prosecutor probably liked the answer, except for the obvious fact that it was not responsive to his question. So he tried again, inquiring whether it took a lot of persuasion from the CIA case officer to go through with his assigned mission to Vienna. The query was an evident prompt for a "No" answer. But Mr. Merlin replied: "I don't know."

The prosecutor tried again, asking whether he had been reluctant to agree to go ahead with the task. At first there was no answer, just conspicuous silence. Then: "I don't know." Then: "I didn't have any doubts. I didn't hesitate."

All this is potentially important to the case, since the government is asserting that Risen's book is inaccurate, that Operation Merlin was actually near flawless and that Sterling invented concerns and a narrative that unfairly characterized it.

Everyone agrees that Sterling went through proper channels to share his concerns and classified information with Senate Intelligence Committee staff in early March 2003. But the prosecution, armed with a 10-count felony indictment, alleges that he also went to Risen and disclosed classified information. Sterling says he's innocent on all counts.

The government hadn't wanted Mr. Merlin to testify, contending that he was too ill (with kidney cancer), but U.S. District Court Judge Leonie Brinkema ruled for a video deposition. That turned out to be unfortunate for the prosecutors, since Merlin became foggy and evasive under cross-examination, with increasing frequency of replies like "I can't recall" and "I don't remember." Dense fog of his own making eclipsed Mr. Merlin as a star witness for the government.

To close out the trial's first week, before a three-day weekend, the government called more CIA witnesses to the stand. They hammered at the vital need for scrupulous rectitude from CIA officers to obey the law and regulations in handling classified materials.

As you might imagine, none had anything to say about disapproval of violating laws against torture or destroying evidence of torture. Nor did any allude to realities of extremely selective prosecution for leaks, with top U.S. government officials and the CIA press office routinely funneling classified information to

favorite journalists.

But high-ranking officials and PR operatives are not the only CIA employees apt to elude intense scrutiny for possibly leaking to the press. Judging from testimony at the trial, the harshest investigative spotlight shines on those seen as malcontents. The head of the CIA press office, William Harlow, indicated that Sterling (who is African American) became a quick suspect in the Operation Merlin leak case because he'd previously filed a suit charging the agency with racial bias.

Sterling's other transgressions against a de facto code of silence included his visit to Capitol Hill when he spilled classified beans to Senate oversight committee staffers.

In the courtroom, during the trial's first week, I often sat near retired CIA analyst Ray McGovern, who chaired the National Intelligence Estimates in the 1980s and prepared the CIA's daily briefs for presidents from John Kennedy to George H.W. Bush. I wondered what McGovern was making of the spectacle; I found out when he wrote that "the real subtext of the Sterling case is how the politicization of the CIA's analytical division over the past several decades has contributed to multiple intelligence failures, especially efforts to 'prove' that targeted regimes in the Middle East were amassing weapons of mass destruction."

There's no telling whether members of the jury will grasp this "real subtext." Judge Brinkema seems determined to exclude anything more than faint wisps of such context. Overall, an elastic sense of scope is prevailing from the bench, to the benefit of the government.

"In the Sterling case, federal prosecutors seem to want to have it both ways," McGovern observed. "They want to broaden the case to burnish the CIA's reputation regarding its covert-op skills but then to narrow the case if defense attorneys try to show the jury the broader context in which the 'Merlin' disclosures were made in 2006, how President George W. Bush's administration was trying to build a case for war with Iran over its nuclear program much as it did over Iraq's non-existent WMDs in 2002-2003."

Along the way, the CIA is eager to use the trial as much as possible for image damage control, trying to ascend high ground that has eroded in part due to high-quality journalistic accounts of the sort that Risen provided in his *State of War* reporting on Operation Merlin. And the CIA wants a very harsh prison sentence to serve as a warning to others.

The CIA is on a quest for more respect, from news media, from lawmakers, from

potential recruits, from anyone willing to defer to its authority, no matter how legally hypocritical or morally absent. Demolishing the life of Jeffrey Sterling is just another means to that end.

Norman Solomon is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy and the author of *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He is a co-founder of RootsAction.org. [This article originally appeared at ExposeFacts.org]
