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Whose Monster? A Study in the Rise to Power of al Qaeda and the Taliban

Nicholas Kotarski

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College, nick.kotarski357@gmail.com

Advisor

York A. Norman, Ph.D., Associate Professor

First Reader

York A. Norman, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Second Reader

Albert L. Michaels, Ph.D., Professor

Department Chair

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D. Professor and Chair

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State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History and Social Studies Education

Whose Monster?
A Study of the Rise to Power
of al Qaeda and the Taliban

A Thesis in
History

By

Nicholas B. Kotarski

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Approved by:

York A. Norman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of History
Chairperson of the Committee/Thesis Advisor

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D.
Chair and Professor of History

Kevin J. Miller Ed.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Chapter I: Introduction

The most well-known scholarly perspective on why the Taliban and al Qaeda rose to power in Afghanistan in the 1990s can be traced back to the term *blowback*, Chalmers Johnson's term for the unintended negative consequences of well-intentioned American foreign policy. Originally used by Johnson to describe the fallout from American involvement in East Asia, blowback has become increasingly associated with the failings of American policy in South Asia and the Middle East. Given Johnson's experience as a consultant for the CIA, it is only appropriate that he was the first major academic to alert the public about the ramifications of the CIA's unchecked power.¹ It is also worth noting that Johnson wrote this book in the wake of the increasing criticism being levied against President George W. Bush for launching America's 2003 invasion of Iraq due to bad intelligence regarding Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction.

The majority of the academic writing on the emerging subject of the Taliban and al Qaeda's ascent tend to place the blame squarely at the feet of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for funding the mujahedeen, many of whom would eventually go on to have rather successful careers as members of either the Taliban or al Qaeda, with the most famous of all obviously being Osama bin Laden. The most famous of the books written about the CIA's role in the formation of al Qaeda and the Taliban is George Crile's *Charlie Wilson's War*, also written in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which describes how the playboy congressman from Texas convinced his colleagues, with the help of a friend in the CIA and several other sources, funded the mujahedeen in

¹ Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York City: Holt Paperbacks, 2004).

their fight against the invading Soviet Union, who was America's archnemesis at the time. Unfortunately, as evident when he said "My God, what have we done?", upon first seeing about the 9/11 attacks on the news, he did not fully comprehend the possibility that the rebels that he authorized the CIA to assist could someday turn their backs on their benefactors.² The book, which honestly reads more like a novel than a scholarly work, received even more attention when it was later adapted into a popular motion picture starring Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts. Charlie Wilson is not the only work that supports this theory of blowback. Steve Coll also believes that 9/11 and the rash of al Qaeda attacks on American targets throughout the 1990s was a direct result of ignorance on the part of the CIA. Coll's work not only outlines the numerous blunders made by the CIA and its associate organizations both during and after the Soviet-Afghan War, but also provides an intimate look at the lives of the mujahedeen rebels who sought to keep the Red Army out of their homeland. Another book which considers the CIA to be chiefly responsible for both 9/11 and the aforementioned spate of al Qaeda attacks in the 1990s is Peter Dale Scott's *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*³. This tome posits that a "deep state" truly pulls the strings of America's government and has been desperately trying to conceal the many crimes that have committed around the globe in the name of preserving America's empire.

One author who rejects this theory of "blowback" is Peter Bergen, whose book Holy War Inc. takes a look at the role the CIA played in al Qaeda's rise to prominence with a particular emphasis on Osama bin Laden, whom Bergen has the distinction of

² George Crile III, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of How the Wildest Man in Congress and a Rogue CIA Agent Changed the History of Our Times* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003).

³ Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

being the first ever person to interview him on television. He eventually concludes in his chapter on the CIA that, although major mistakes were certainly made in the way the CIA handled the Soviet-Afghan conflict, their overall responsibility for al Qaeda and the Taliban's creation has been grossly exaggerated by the media over the years.⁴ Bergen is not alone in absolving the CIA from having any responsibility for al Qaeda and the Taliban's creation, as Mohammad Yousaf, in *The Battle For Afghanistan*, co-written with Mark Adkin, contends that the CIA had very little, if any responsibility for the Taliban and al Qaeda's descent, since the CIA only provided the money and weapons for the mujahedeen and did not train them.⁵

Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, along with its' miniseries adaptation, posits that al Qaeda was able to carry out 9/11 was because the CIA and FBI have historically had considerable difficulties communicating with each other, which allowed al Qaeda to fly under the radar at the worst possible time. As a result, he believes that the best way to respond to the threat of terrorism in the future is through reforming these organizations to improve relations between them.⁶ Mark Riebling's aptly titled *Wedge: From Pearl Harbor to 9/11: How the Secret War between the FBI and CIA has Endangered National Security*, is another excellent work about the legendary rivalry between the FBI and CIA. This somewhat depressing read paints a fascinatingly dark picture of the numerous profound cultural and technological differences between the two agencies, along with the well-deserved reputation of

⁴ Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War Inc.* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

⁵ Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Battle for Afghanistan: The Soviets Versus the Mujahideen during the 1980s.* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 1992)

⁶ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

American bureaucracy to get very little done. As a result of this ineptness, the American intelligence community was painstakingly slow to adapt to the new security challenges that the nation faced in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War.⁷

The truth is that the CIA was only one of a myriad of factors that contributed to the Taliban and al Qaeda's reign of terror in both Afghanistan and a large swath of the Western world. One factor was their immediate neighbor to the east, Pakistan, who likely viewed Afghanistan as a powerful buffer against potential aggression from their archnemesis India. Although both Peter Dale Scott and Michael Griffin both noted that the CIA did give generously to the mujahedeen in their jihad against the Soviet Union, the Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's version of the CIA, had the final say on who received the monies. Unfortunately for the United States, Pakistan preferred to fund the more fundamentalist-leaning members of the mujahedeen such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar than the considerably more moderate fighters, such as Ahmad Shah Masood, that the CIA would have rather helped. In addition to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia (who Osama bin Laden's family's construction company had a close business relationship with) also has been accused of being a major benefactor to the Taliban and al Qaeda, likely in no small part due to the fact that the Wahhabi school of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia is strikingly similar to Islam as it was practiced in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule there. Scott and Crile both offer excellent explanations as to just how close the relationship was between Saudi Arabia and the Taliban.

⁷ Mark Riebling, *Wedge: From Pearl Harbor to 9/11: How the Secret War between the FBI and CIA has Endangered National Security* (New York City: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

Although the CIA certainly deserves some of the blame for al Qaeda and the Taliban becoming a headache for the Western world (particularly because they were not more forceful in demanding that the ISI send their money to moderate mujahedeen fighters instead of the Islamic fundamentalists Pakistan preferred), they were far from the only guilty party when it comes to bearing responsibility for the Taliban and al Qaeda. Whether talking about the close political and military ties between Afghanistan and both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia or ideological influences such as Sayyid Qutb, there is certainly no shortage of directions in which one can point fingers as to why al Qaeda and the Taliban were able to become as successful as they were. Not to mention the fact that, despite the popular belief to the contrary, it was Pakistan's ISI, and not the CIA, who provided all of the in-field training for the mujahedeen. Additionally, other American government agencies, particularly the State Department and the FBI, did an embarrassingly bad job of keeping individuals suspected of having terrorist ties out of the United States throughout the 1990s. The KGB spread propaganda and disinformation in an attempt to ruin the mujahedeen's reputation among Afghans. Finally, noted Islamist Hassan al-Turabi personally invited both Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri to live in Sudan after they had been expelled from their home countries of Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Turabi quickly publicly came to bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's defense a few years later after Al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad attempted to assassinate Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.

In the first chapter, the legitimacy of the "blowback" theory will be closely examined, primarily through the works of Crile, Coll, and Scott. These authors shed light on how much of a role the CIA played in the mujahedeen's success against the Soviet

Union in Afghanistan and the eventual transformation of select mujahid from freedom fighters forever indebted to Washington into the religious fanatics that tried to bring down the World Trade Center a few years later.

The next chapter will discuss another potential lost opportunity involving the CIA that may have inadvertently helped al Qaeda carry out all those attacks against American targets in the 1990s as well as 9/11: the agency's longstanding feud with the FBI. Lawrence Wright and Mark Riebling expose the lack of communication between these two legendary agencies⁸⁹. This rift had the unfortunate effect of preventing them from working together in order to keep America safe from the new threat of Islamic terrorism that had emerged out of the ashes of the end of the Cold War. In addition this thesis will also examine several plots that al Qaeda intended to carry out but were fortunately foiled by American and foreign law enforcement.

Finally, after all of these factors have been closely examined, we will which, if any party, bears the most guilt for al Qaeda and the Taliban becoming the monsters they are now known as. Considering the complexities surrounding these various factors, narrowing the culprit down to one will certainly not be an easy feat.

⁸ Wright, *The Looming Tower*.

⁹ Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan* (Sterling VA, Pluto Press: 2001).

Chapter II: Background and the Cases for and Against CIA Guilt

Why the CIA got Involved and the Case for Culpability.

The American event most associated with Chalmers Johnson's idea of "blowback" is, far and away, Operation Cyclone, the CIA-led covert operation to provide funding and weapons to the mujahedeen of Afghanistan during their war with the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Of all the books written about this controversial subject, the best academic treatise on the topic is Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars* (2004). Beginning with the events immediately leading up to the Soviet invasion and ending the day before the tragic events of September 11th, Coll lays out a comprehensive study of the CIA's role in the Soviet-Afghan conflict, the major players from the mujahedeen that the CIA financed, and how the CIA effectively dropped the ball by supporting the more fundamentalist mujahedeen ones Pakistan preferred instead of the more moderate members. With that in mind, now is good of a time as any to take a look at the chief beneficiaries of the CIA's financial assistance.

Abdul Haq was born into a rather distinguished Pashtun family near Jalalabad, like a disturbing number of other jihadis. Unusually for a member of the mujahedeen, however, religion did not appear to be a significant factor in his personal motivations for taking up arms against the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Haq would eventually become an exceptionally valuable asset in the CIA's future efforts to aid the mujahedeen.¹⁰

Another major player in the mujahedeen who would eventually become one of the Taliban's fiercest critics in the 1990s – a position that would eventually prove to be his

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 68.

undoing, was Tajik Ahmed Shah Masood. Unlike Haq, Masood was a piously devout Muslim. After the United States left Afghanistan to fend for itself after the 1989 Soviet withdrawal, Masood continued to fight the good fight and attempted to prevent the Taliban from rising to power. Although he failed in this pursuit, Masood was a constant thorn in the Taliban's side throughout the remainder of the 1990s, continuing to fervently push for increased women's rights as well as the overall secularization of Afghanistan, as opposed to the almost cartoon-like Wahhabi style of theocracy imposed upon the Afghan people by the Taliban.¹¹ Even though Masood was understandably disappointed that the United States had effectively abandoned him and the mujahedeen after the departure of the Soviets, the Taliban, and by extension, al Qaeda, still considered Masood to be both still dangerously close enough to the United States and personally a threat to their stranglehold on power to assassinate him two days before the September 11th attacks, assumedly to prevent him from becoming an invaluable asset in the United States eventual efforts to both oust the Taliban and capture Osama bin Laden.

Another important member of the mujahedeen who would go on to considerably mold the ideology of the Taliban was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. One of the biggest recipients of funding from both the American and Pakistani intelligence agencies, Hekmatyar would later gain widespread scorn and criticism for his military tactics, which caused far more civilian deaths than those of Soviet troops. Also, in a preview of things to come under the Taliban regime, women in areas under his control were subject to strict restrictions on their movement and behavior. Two notably disturbing incidents author Andrew Hartman notes in “*The Red Template: US Policy in Soviet-Occupied*

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19-25.

Afghanistan” were throwing acid on the faces of women who refused to wear veils and an attack in 1980 on a Soviet school where girls were taught alongside boys.¹²

After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, Hekmatyar became one of the leading figures in the Taliban during the subsequent Afghan Civil War, where his infamously ruthless tactics in combat all but assured a Taliban victory. His Wahhabi-influenced ideology would later be a profound influence on the way the Taliban ruled Afghanistan once they came to power, most famously through their severe curtailing of women’s rights and their strict prohibitions on any Western influences that could even remotely be conceived as “fun”, such as sports, music, movies, and television. Amazingly, as a recent *New York Times* article revealed, even more than thirty years later, Hekmatyar is still as involved as ever in Afghanistan’s government, recently returning to the negotiation table with President Ashraf Ghani in an attempt to bring some semblance of stability to one of the most tragically war-torn nations in modern history.¹³

As evident by the differing identities of Haq, Masood, and Hekmatyar, Afghanistan, largely as a result of its treacherously rugged terrain, is divided into numerous diverse ethnic groups, which are, then again, as a result of the country’s geography, further divided into hundreds of tribes. In another report released by the CIA in 1980, the agency interestingly pointed out that the importance of tribal loyalties varied widely throughout the country, with Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Nuristanis being more loyal to their tribes, likely as a result of their traditional ways of life. In contrast, Uzbeks and

¹² Andrew Hartman, "The Red Template': US Policy in Soviet-Occupied Afghanistan." *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (June 2002), 467-9.

¹³ Andrew E. Kramer, "Once-Feared Afghan Warlord Is Still Causing Trouble, But Talking Peace." *The New York Times*, March 4, 2018. Accessed March 5, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/world/asia/afghanistan-gulbuddin-hekmatyar.html>.

Turkmen felt relatively little loyalty to any particular tribe. Due to these varying degrees of loyalty exhibited by these numerous ethnic groups, the Soviet Union had fairly limited success in utilizing divide-and-conquer methods in their attempts to win over the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. On one hand, the more secular Uzbeks and Turkmen were likely easier to sway towards the communist camp. On the other hand, the more devout Pashtuns and Tajiks, whose members were for the most part were piously devout Muslims, would have been a considerably tougher sell for the Soviet Union.¹⁴ In another report released by the Defense Intelligence Agency two years later, intelligence officials highly praised the resolve of the insurgency against the superior firepower of the Red Army, while also citing the ever-important role of Afghanistan's legendary geography in keeping the Soviet military in a constant uphill battle to confine the mujahedeen to one area.¹⁵

Although many scholars have claimed that the Wahhabi/Salafist ideology so closely associated with the Taliban and al Qaeda came from the Arabs that came to fight for the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, the evidence indicates this influence is grossly overhyped. Multiple sources have indicated that the mujahedeen saw the Afghan Arabs as a considerable nuisance, believing that their religious fanaticism prevented them from truly understanding the threat the Soviets posed to Afghanistan's sovereignty.

Another author who promoted the CIA-Taliban/al Qaeda connection was George Crile, who made quite a name for himself with the publication of his bestseller *Charlie*

¹⁴ United States. Central Intelligence Agency. Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Political Analysis. *The Soviets and Tribes of Southwest Asia*. Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, 1980.

¹⁵ United States. Defense Intelligence Agency. Directorate for Research. *Afghan Resistance*. By Gordon Negus and Chuck Witten. Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 1982.

Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History. The book, along with its' subsequent adaptation into a major Hollywood film starring Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts, dramatically increased the American public's interest in the CIA's role in the Taliban and al Qaeda's creation. While Charlie Wilson plays a central role in Coll's *Ghost Wars*, the novel-like style of *Charlie Wilson's War* makes it much more digestible for the average reader.

Charles Nesbitt Wilson could best be described, at first glance, as the Congressional equivalent of Dos Equis' "Most Interesting Man in the World". A liberal Democrat in the traditionally deep red state of Texas, Wilson quickly gained a reputation among his colleagues in the House of Representatives as a consummate connoisseur of booze, drugs, beautiful women, and the finer things in life. Quite appropriately enough, his first glimpse of the desperate plight of Afghanistan's mujahedeen occurred while in a hot tub surrounded by bombshells during a cocaine-fueled bender at Las Vegas' iconic Caesars Palace hotel and casino in late June of 1980. One night while Wilson was carousing with numerous women in a Jacuzzi, a TV set in the room happened to be tuned to CBS Evening News where Dan Rather – on the cusp of replacing the incomparable Walter Cronkite as lead anchor, was serving as a correspondent in Afghanistan reporting on the tragic plight of the countless Afghanistan refugees who had fled for greener pastures in neighboring Pakistan. These harrowing images served to prove that Charlie Wilson, a man who on the surface could understandably be perceived by the uninitiated observer as nothing more than a narcissistic playboy on a power trip, truly possessed a

heart of gold.¹⁶ Over course of the decade, Wilson used his renowned Texan charm, ability to cross the political divide, and numerous foreign connections – most notably in Israel, to embark on a humanitarian mission in Afghanistan that would play a measurable part in the eventual downfall of the Soviet Union, eventually becoming the biggest arms deal of the 1980s despite the greater fame of the Iran-Contra deal. To Wilson’s credit, upon finding out that the September 11th attacks had happened, he immediately realized the tragic consequences of his earlier actions, as evident by his first words upon seeing the Twin Towers on the verge of collapse: “My God, what have we done?”

Although Wilson was far and away the most well-known public figure associated with the CIA’s operations in Afghanistan in the 1980s, he was not the only man responsible for convincing Congress to take the tremendous gamble of meddling in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Yale graduate and Pittsburgh native Gustav “Gust” Avrakotos, the son of Greek immigrants, had joined the CIA in 1962. When he first came to Langley, he was initially assigned to an anti-communist operation in Greece due to his knowledge of the language.¹⁷ This experience working to defeat communism wherever it could be found made Afghanistan all the more alluring of a workplace for Gust. However, his anticommunist mentality was not the only thing that made Afghanistan so enticing, as he also saw numerous similarities between himself and the countless Afghan refugees he encountered in the camps in Pakistan as well as the mujahedeen themselves, such as the very hardy lifestyle of the Afghan people and their love of lamb meat, a

¹⁶ Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, 24-39.

¹⁷ "Gust Avrakotos." Wikipedia, February 17, 2018. Accessed February 21, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gust_Avrakotos.

commonality they shared with his fellow Greeks.¹⁸ As Gust gradually assumed more and more responsibility for the CIA's operations in Afghanistan, he became increasingly frustrated by the ridiculous amount of bureaucratic red tape that stood in the way of the CIA ramping up their efforts to assist the mujahedeen in bleeding the Soviets dry. In order to get around this irritating bureaucratic run-around, Gust would intentionally make the internal communications with his colleagues regarding the weapons to be provided to the mujahedeen as ambiguous as possible. In one particularly memorable passage from *Charlie Wilson's War*, Crile mentions that his dealings with the CIA lawyers became so ridiculously absurd that, in his words, "Saturday Night Live couldn't even do it justice".¹⁹

During the later years of the Soviet-Afghan conflict, a terrifying new weapon suddenly came into play that permanently altered the course of the war – the Stinger missile. This heat-seeking shoulder-fired anti-aircraft weapon quickly shifted the direction of the conflict in the mujahedeen's favor. Prior to the introduction of this horrifying weapon, Soviet aircraft regularly humiliated the mujahedeen, who up to this point relied on relatively obsolete weapons to take on the Red Army. Initially, there were considerable reservations within the CIA about giving the mujahedeen such advanced technology, which was certainly understandable given the fears of some in the agency that the missiles could fall into improper hands once the war came to a close. At first, the Soviet Air Force was taken completely off guard, with pilot losses mounting quickly. However, the Soviets subsequently adapted to this innovative technology by putting heat-radiating attachments on their helicopters in order to deliberately confuse the Stinger's

¹⁸ Crile, 224.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 240-1.

heat-seeking technology. In the years since the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, there has been much lively debate among scholars and historians as to exactly how large of a role the Stinger played in making the Soviet Union leave Afghanistan when they did. One party argues that the innovative technology overwhelmed the Soviet air force primarily because they were unable to develop effective technology to counter these missiles. Another side argues that the Stinger's impact on the timing of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is dramatically overestimated, as deteriorating domestic conditions within the Soviet Union, combined with the increasing toll of the Afghanistan conflict on Moscow's coffers, proved to be an increasingly unsustainable situation, and that something had to give eventually, that something eventually being the occupation of Afghanistan. The last side claims that Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was inevitable primarily because of the new wave of young officials such as Mikhail Gorbachev who were making their way into the Kremlin and increasingly saw Soviet efforts to maintain their empire throughout the world as an increasingly wasteful use of the nation's resources when their citizens were suffering so much.²⁰

One of the most important individuals when it comes to the responsibility of what would eventually become al Qaeda's reach into the United States was Egyptian double agent Ali Abdul Saoud Mohamed. A former translator for Ayman al-Zawahiri, Mohamed was later enlisted by the CIA to recruit American Muslims to fight for the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, which he did at Farouq Mosque's al Kifah Refugee Center in Brooklyn. This facility would subsequently also be used as a recruiting center by Maktab al-

²⁰ Alan J. Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan ." *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 219-63.

Khidmat founder Sheikh Abdullah Azzam and Omar Abdel-Rahman. Most importantly, however, it would come to be the training ground for 1993 World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef. As Peter Dale Scott notes in his book *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*, Azzam preferred to recruit mujahedeen from the United States because free speech was much more heavily restricted in the Middle East.²¹ Also, during this time, he managed to impressively work his way up the ranks in the United States Army, eventually achieving the rank of drill sergeant. Unfortunately for the United States, Mohamed was eventually able to successfully parlay the numerous martial skills he had acquired in the Army to train such notable names as al-Zawahiri and bin Laden in various terrorist tactics.²² His story gets even more interesting when one considers that, before he joined the U.S. Army, Mohamed had served as a captain in the Egyptian Army. His first taste of American military experience came via a foreign officer training program offered by the U.S. Army before offering to defect to the CIA and become a spy. Eventually, his willingness to help both sides out would work in his favor, as he ended up making a lucrative plea deal in exchange for turning on Osama bin Laden in his trial over his involvement in the 1998 United States Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.²³ Peter Dale Scott is a particularly fascinating proponent of the “blowback” theory due to his belief not only that the CIA was responsible for the Taliban and al Qaeda, but that a “deep state” within the federal government has been hard at work for decades trying to

²¹ Peter Dale Scott, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008) 122.

²² <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/////torture/interviews/cloonan.html>

²³ Tom Hays and Sharon Theimer, "In Life of Double-Crosses, Egyptian Worked with Green Berets and bin Laden" *Black Hills Pioneer*, 26 December 2001.

conceal from the American public the numerous crimes committed around the globe by the CIA on America's behalf.

As Sebastian Schnelle argues, the aforementioned Azzam, not bin Laden, may very well be more responsible for al Qaeda becoming the terrorist juggernaut it is known as today. Considering Azzam's earlier calls for all Muslims to take up arms whenever they felt Islam was under attack, he can certainly be considered the textbook case of the famous adage among historians that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". Like fellow al Qaeda founders Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden (which will be elaborated on more later), Azzam was a devout student of both Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna during his formative years as a university student. In 1979, following the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, Azzam published his seminal *fatwa* (Islamic judicial opinion) "Defense of the Muslim Lands", whose subsequent approval by Saudi Grand Mufti²⁴ Sheik Abdul Aziz bin Bazz, effectively set the pendulum in motion for the mujahedeen's ruthless jihad against their Soviet overlords. Much like Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan at the beginning of the Soviet war suffered from an embarrassing lack of manpower, which led Azzam to call for all able-bodied Muslim males in the world to come and defend Afghanistan from these "godless brutes." In 1983, Azzam met Osama bin Laden and the two quickly became close allies. Thanks to bin Laden's family's close connections with the Saudi government as a result of his father's construction business, thousands of young men from across the Middle East converged

²⁴ Grand Mufti is the highest official of religious law in a Sunni or Ibadi Muslim country

onto Afghanistan in order to avenge what they perceived to be nothing less than a blasphemous attack on their sacred faith.²⁵

Tragically, Ali Mohamed was not the only person the United States made the dangerous mistake of allowing into America. As Thomas Copeland once again states, another wolf in sheep's clothing was Wael Hamza Julaidan. During the mid-1980's Julaidan became president of the Tuscon Islamic Center, after which he returned to Afghanistan to begin training mujahedeen fighters. A few years after the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, Julaidan once again began working with the World Muslim League in Bosnia, which was beginning to deal with a devastating war. With Saudi Arabia and Pakistan refusing to take in the aspiring mujahedeen fighters due to the legitimate threat they posed to their governments, Bosnia seemed just as good of a place as any for the army to offload the young jihadi who had learned his craft at the infamous al-Kifah Mosque in Brooklyn.²⁶

After the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, a serious new internal conflict began to emerge within the CIA. Now that a major power vacuum had emerged in regard to who would rule Afghanistan in the long-term, the CIA now had to make the difficult decision of which of the warring parties to support. As the then-current president, Mohammad Najibullah, had strong ties to Moscow, Washington obviously did not want him to remain in power. These anticommunist stalwarts considered Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to be Afghanistan's best hope for long-term stability, in spite of his ultra-fundamentalist religious beliefs, a point that was duly noted by the more moderate voices within the

²⁵ Sebastian Schnelle, 2012, "Abdullah Azzam, Ideologue of Jihad: Freedom Fighter or Terrorist?" *Journal of Church and State* 54 (4): 625-47.

²⁶ Scott, *The Road to 9/11*, 124-30.

CIA. These more moderate individuals within the CIA threw their support behind Ahmad Shah Masood, who, given his more secular views on how Afghanistan should be governed, would have been, in hindsight, the most ideal mujahedeen leader for the United States to support in the crucial first post-Soviet years.²⁷ However, Pakistan's ISI controlled the CIA's purse strings, so the funding ultimately ended up going to Hekmatyar. In any event, this internal crisis at Langley would ultimately prove meaningless, as the 1992 Peshawar Accord establishing a post-war interim government would result (despite the fierce objections of bin Laden) in the creation of a highly praised coalition government that included members of both Masood and Hekmatyar's organizations. Masood's primary reasoning behind the creation of a coalition government was rather honorable, as he believed that all of the parties that had been involved in driving the Soviets out of Afghanistan should have an equal say in how the nation was governed.²⁸

Four years after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, the Stinger missiles that the United States had secretly given the mujahedeen in order to bring down the Soviet aircraft which rained down terror on the innocent civilians of Afghanistan were finally turned back onto American forces. Trained by the same mujahedeen who had driven the Soviets out of Afghanistan, several members of the Somali militia brought down three Black Hawk helicopters using a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launcher during the Battle of Mogadishu several years after the mujahedeen had emerged victorious in

²⁷ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 190-99.

²⁸ Nojumi Neamatollah, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil War, and the Future of the Region*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 112.

Afghanistan. This event would subsequently be made famous around the world after it was immortalized in Ridley Scott's 2001 film *Black Hawk Down*.²⁹

Another historical event that provides damning evidence of the CIA's at least partial role in the creation of what would come to be al Qaeda is the infamous 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. Carried out a few weeks after the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, the attack served as a rude awakening to Americans that they were no longer immune from the kinds of terrorist attacks that had, up until that point, been largely seen as phenomenon exclusive to foreign countries. The mastermind of these attacks was Omar Abdel-Rahman, commonly referred to as "the blind sheikh/cleric" due to his disability. The attack itself was carried out by Ramzi Yousef, who was, interestingly, the nephew of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attack. As Peter Lance claims, Abdel-Rahman first arrived in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1988 after serving prison time in Egypt. While there, he met Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, founder of the Makhtab al-Khidamat, or MAK, which was the direct predecessor of al Qaeda. Over the course of the next few years, the MAK would go on to establish satellite offices around the world in order to spread their message of jihad, much to Azzam's delight.³⁰ The following year, the American government made a major mistake by granting Abdel Rahman, who had been on a terrorist watch list for the previous few years, a visa to come to the United States via the American consulate in Sudan, which subsequently allowed Abdel Rahman to meet Ramzi Yousef and carry out the 1993 World Trade

²⁹ Scott, 105-6

³⁰ The growing rift between Azzam, who wanted to focus on establishing a caliphate in Afghanistan, and Abdel Rahman and bin Laden, who wanted to focus on waging jihad around the globe, would eventually lead to Azzam's assassination the following year.

Center bombing.³¹ As Tom Copeland observed, one of the biggest mistakes the Clinton administration made in the immediate aftermath of the WTC bombing was treating the attack as a criminal matter to be handled by local police, rather than a national security problem that would have allowed the FBI and CIA to probe deeper into the lives of the suspects.³²

One of the most visible individuals who believed that there was indisputable evidence of a correlation between the CIA and al Qaeda was former British MP Robin Cook. In an article published in *The Guardian* a few days after the July 2005 London bombings, Cook wrote:

Bin Laden was, though, a product of a monumental miscalculation by western security agencies. Throughout the 80s he was armed by the CIA and funded by the Saudis to wage jihad against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Al-Qaida, literally "the database", was originally the computer file of the thousands of mujahideen who were recruited and trained with help from the CIA to defeat the Russians. Inexplicably, and with disastrous consequences, it never appears to have occurred to Washington that once Russia was out of the way, Bin Laden's organisation would turn its attention to the west.³³

If one thinks that America's involvement with the Afghanistan mujahedeen ended with the Soviet departure of Afghanistan in 1989, they are, tragically, sadly mistaken. As Peter Dale Scott outlines, after the collapse of the Soviet Union on Christmas Day 1991, many American petroleum companies, desperate as ever for more sources of revenue,

³¹ Peter Lance, "Blowback: The Potential Lethal Fallout from the Secret CIA-Saudi Deal to Arm the Syrian Rebels." *The Huffington Post*. January 26, 2016. Accessed February 15, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-lance/blowback-the-potential-le_b_9073374.html.

³² Copeland, *Fool me Twice: Intelligence Failure and Mass Casualty Terrorism*, 25.

³³ Robin Cook, (8 July 2005). "The Struggle against Terrorism Cannot be Won by Military Means" *The Guardian*. London: theguardian.com.

began to carefully eye many of the emerging breakaway Soviet republics as lucrative places to drill for black gold. As a result, when Pakistan and Afghanistan ordered the Arab Afghans who were still in their respective countries to leave, most of the Tajik and Uzbek members of the mujahedeen simply proceeded to return to their homelands, the newly-established republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where they proceeded to sow discord there, much to the delight of American oil companies. The biggest mujahedeen operation in these breakaway former Soviet republics, however was in Azerbaijan. There, several former Air Force officers who were involved in the Iran-Contra scandal assisted Arab Afghans through a company they founded called MEGA Oil This company was contracted by the H.W. Bush administration to examine the feasibility of constructing an oil pipeline stretching from Azerbaijan to Turkey. Another unfortunate tragic side effect of this scandalous meddling in Azerbaijani affairs was the fact that the Afghani heroin, whose manufacture had been halted by the Soviets during their time in Afghanistan, started flowing once again, this time to Chechnya via Azerbaijan. This very well may have been a concentrated covert effort to get the invading Russian troops addicted to this terrible narcotic. After bin Laden set up a non-government organization (NGO) in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku for the purpose of training terrorists and sending them elsewhere, al Qaeda's presence in the former Soviet Union's footprint in Central Asia was permanently solidified.³⁴

A few short years later, al Qaeda, the American government, and the oil industry's paths would cross yet again in the most unlikely of places – Kosovo. In another unfortunate application of the famous phrase “the enemy of my enemy is my

³⁴ *Ibid*, 139-42.

friend,” al Qaeda and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ended up supporting the same rebel group in the Kosovo Conflict: the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA or UCK). Amazingly and tragically, the United States had designated the KLA as a terrorist organization due to their participation in the heroin trade. In 1998, most Americans who were following the American involvement in Kosovo on the news were mystified as to why America decided to get involved there in the first place. As it turns out, the instability in Kosovo was seen by oil executives as a troublesome stumbling block which stood in the way of the construction of yet another pipeline, this time through the Balkans.³⁵

In the defense of the CIA, however, it is almost certain that neither Charlie Wilson or anyone else in the CIA could have possibly predicted that the mujahedeen would have the gall to bite the hand that fed them. Although there were certainly red flags that certain members of the mujahedeen were deserving of extra surveillance after the Soviets left, Langley unfortunately opted to approach the mujahedeen with a rather callous “set-it-and-forget-it” mindset after their job was done. Also, rather depressingly, the CIA’s history of not fully thinking through the future consequences of their covert operations at the expense of future bloodshed goes back much further than the average American is aware. Back during World War II, the CIA’s predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), led by “Wild” Bill Donovan, gave almost identical assistance to Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh (who were, ironically, Communist) in order to stave off Japanese occupation of French Indochina. Fifteen short years later, Minh and his Viet

³⁵ *Ibid*, 144-5.

Cong showed their gratitude to Uncle Sam by sucking the United States into what is still to this day America's bloodiest conflict since World War II: the Vietnam War³⁶. That being said, it is very easy to understand why, given the considerable humiliation America suffered in Vietnam at the hands of the Moscow and Beijing-supported Viet Cong, America would want to give the Soviet Union a taste of their own medicine as soon as possible. In addition, anyone with even a modicum of compassion towards humanity would have wanted to help the horrifically oppressed people of Afghanistan in beating back the mighty Red Army.

Aside from the Soviet-Afghan War, there was another example in the 1980s of America assisting a foreign power in a conflict only for it to come back to haunt them later on, albeit fortunately not as severely as Afghanistan. During that decade, Iran became embroiled in a fierce conventional war with their next-door neighbor Iraq. Given the day-and night differences in the way the two countries were ruled (theocracy in Iran vs. secular dictatorship in Iraq), a clash between the two countries seemed inevitable. Due to the fierce animosity that had developed between the United States and Iran as a result of the 1979 Revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis, the United States made the rather cynical decision to provide Iraq with various means of support throughout the war. After this long and bloody war concluded, Saddam would go on to use many of the weapons the United States provided them in their invasion of Kuwait in 1990, setting the

³⁶ Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against Japan* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2006).

stage for the 1991 Persian Gulf War, which was won handily by the United States in a matter of weeks.³⁷

At this juncture, it is worth noting that the CIA is far from the first organization to employ proxies to do their dirty work. As Idean Salehyan posits, many other foreign countries have enlisted the help of less-than-honorable groups to harass their enemies and maintain a safe distance from any real conflict. One of the most well-known examples cited by Salehyan is Iran's well-documented support of the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah, whose attacks in both Lebanon and Israel have resulted in the latter becoming Iran's most bitter enemy since the 1979 Revolution. Another organization that was created by a foreign party in order to create the illusion of plausible deniability was, surprisingly, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, or PLO. This organization was created by the Arab League with the objective of pestering Israel to the point that it would no longer be considered feasible to stay in what was considered to be Arab territory. Salehyan carefully analyzes the primary reasons that nations delegate the duties of war to rebels. The first reason he discusses is when the expected casualties of warfare are high and the tolerance of such costs is correspondingly low. The United States, at this particular time, could not be a better example of this logic, as the horrific and needless devastation that the Vietnam War had wrought on America's psyche meant that the country had no desire to be sucked into another potentially endless conflict that could possibly cost more American lives.³⁸

³⁷ Mark Phythian, *Arming Iraq: How the US and Britain Secretly Built Saddam's War Machine* (Lebanon NH: Northeastern University Press, 1997)

³⁸ Idean Salehyan, "The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 3 (2010): 493-515.

At first glance, it is quite easy for one to jump to the conclusion that the American government's ignorance and hubris opened the door to 9/11 and the numerous attacks inflicted on American targets throughout the course of the 1990s. To be fair, that assessment is partially correct, as the CIA should certainly have pushed Pakistan harder to allow them to give aid to the more moderate mujahedeen rebels, not to mention they should have learned from their mistakes in Vietnam about giving aid to organizations that may come back to haunt them in the future. In addition, the CIA and State Department should have conducted thorough background checks on the mujahedeen fighters that they admitted into the United States. Likewise, the CIA and State Department should have established better communications overall between the two agencies. Alas, like almost everything else in life, the truth is much more complicated.

As we shall explore next, although the CIA should certainly not be let off the hook entirely for their role in creating the Taliban and al Qaeda, there was in fact, an equally, if not more, guilty party in creating this "Frankenstein monster". Depressingly, this party was one of America's closest Asian allies during the bulk of the Cold War. In closing, no other country better epitomized the famous historical adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", better than Pakistan. For most of its relatively short history, Pakistan has been a relatively passive observer on the world stage. Unfortunately, subsequent developments would steer this emerging power in a much more bellicose direction.

Part II: Are the Taliban and al Qaeda entirely America's Fault?

In order to better understand the Taliban, it would be very wise to lay out the circumstances in which the Taliban as we know them today came to be. Although the

men who founded the Taliban first rose to prominence as members of the mujahedeen during the Soviet-Afghan War, the Taliban proper actually was founded in 1994 during the aforementioned Afghan Civil War. As Ahmed Rashid describes, the Taliban originated in Kandahar as the victorious party of a considerable amount of infighting among militant Pashtuns in the city. The reason as to why the Taliban were able to succeed can best be explained by looking at why the Nazis were able to come to power in Germany. As the old saying goes, “desperate times call for desperate measures”, as the citizens of both countries were willing, regardless of the consequences, to be ruled by a party that offered long-term stability.¹

The name *Taliban* is the plural form of the Arabic word *talib*, or student. These students were taught at various *madrassas*, the Islamic equivalent of seminaries in the Christian faith. Mullah Omar, who founded the Taliban, underwent religious instruction at Darul Uloom Haqqania, one of Pakistan’s most well-known madrassas. As several other prominent founding members of the Taliban also studied at this institution, the chancellor of this institution, Maulana Sami ul-Haq² is considered by many scholars to be the true “Father of the Taliban”. He considered the mujahedeen’s military campaign against the Soviet Union in the 1980s to be a legitimate jihad, flat out denying that the madrassa sent its students to fight for the mujahedeen. Instead, he claimed that the madrassa students who joined the mujahedeen did so of their own accord. He also

¹ Another interesting parallel noted by Michael Griffin was the negative effects that the Taliban’s discriminatory policies against women had on the nation’s productivity levels. Before the Taliban came to power, a staggering 25% of the people working in Afghanistan’s government were women. When the Taliban ordered these women to leave the workplace and become homemakers, Afghanistan, like Germany when they began sending various productive members of minority groups to concentration camps, began to struggle even more.

² No relation to Abdul Haq.

declared that the numerous claims that terrorists were being trained in the madrassas to be nothing more than baseless Western propaganda. He then proceeded to argue that America's invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11 was just as much a violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty and a justification for jihad as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan more than twenty years earlier. Finally, ul-Haq noted that the bulk of the donations that fund the madrassa's operations comes from the poor part of the Islamic community, not unlike the working-class Catholics who frequently donate to fund the operations of that church's seminaries.³

The gradual transformation of Pakistan from a secular state to a religious one was the primary reason for Pakistan's decision to support the mujahedeen fighters that would eventually become the core of the original Taliban leadership. Although Pakistan was originally created as a safe haven for India's Muslims in the wake of their independence from Great Britain, the nation was not ruled as an Islamic theocracy. All of that changed, however, when general Muhammad Zia ul-Haq⁴ deposed President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto⁵ in a military coup. After he came to power, Zia embarked on an aggressive campaign to Islamize the country's legal system through a process that would come to be known as "Sharization". Under this policy, the previously secular bureaucracy of Pakistan became increasingly permeated by religious officials. These decisions by Zia to Islamize the government should not have come as a surprise to anyone, as his religious piety was evident even before India broke away from Great Britain, as evident by the frustration expressed by his superiors in the British Army at his refusal to conform to the

³ Maulana Sami ul-Haq, interview by Imtiaz Ali, 23 May 2007.

⁴ No known relation to Maulana Sami ul-Haq.

⁵ Father of future Pakistan president Benazir Bhutto.

Westernized ways of his peers. This steadfast devotion to his beliefs would be taken to an even greater extreme when he became an officer and closed down the mess hall during the Ramadan fasting period. Many people who knew Zia as a child attributed his extreme religious piety to the fact that his father was just as devout of a Muslim. In a 1978 interview with the BBC, Zia, when asked if he was a puritan, simply said “All I can say is that I try to be a practicing Muslim. If in the process, I can be termed a puritan, it is up to those who judge... [I]f one can bring back Islam in its purity, it would be a good thing.” Zia would later go on to repeatedly claim that he had been sent on a mission by Allah himself to purify Pakistan. Considering that, as previously mentioned, Pakistan was founded as a place for India’s Muslim population to practice their faith without fear of persecution, one can only wonder why it took so long for Sharia to officially become part of government policy.

Zia himself posited on this topic:

The basis of Pakistan was Islam. The basis of Pakistan was that the Muslims of the sub-continent are a separate culture. It was on the two-nation theory that this part was carved out of the sub-continent as Pakistan. And in the last 30 years in general but more so in the last seven years there has been a complete erosion of the moral values of our society. You will hear that Pakistan is full of corruption today. In spite of on-and-a-half years of Martial Law, corruption is at large, people are dishonest; they want to make money overnight. All this is not my feeling but fact. The moral fiber of the society has been completely broken and this was done basically in the last seven and a half years. Mr. Bhutto’s way of flourishing in this society was by eroding its moral fiber... He eroded the moral fiber of the society by pitching the students against the teachers, sons against the fathers, landlords against the tenants, and factory workers against the mill owners... The economic ills of the country are not because Pakistan is incapable of economic production. It is because Pakistanis have been made to believe that one can earn without working... Therefore, to my mind the most fundamental and important basis for the whole reformation of society is not how much cotton we can grow or how much wheat we can grow. Yes, they are in their own place important factors; but

I think it is the moral rejuvenation which is required first and that will have to be done on the basis of Islam, because it was on this basis that Pakistan was formed... We are going back to Islam not by choice but by the force of circumstances. If we had chosen we might as well have stayed with India. What was wrong with that?... It is not because of anything other than our cultural and moral awareness that Islam is our only salvation... Islam from that point of view is the fundamental factor. It comes from before wheat and rice and everything else. I can grow more wheat; I can import wheat but I cannot import the correct moral values.⁶

Like Zia, Mullah Omar had been exposed to religion from an early age, primarily through his father, who was a religious instructor in their community until he tragically passed away while Omar was still a child. As he got older, Omar became increasingly devoted to his religious studies, associating with other like-minded peers in Kandahar, as opposed to the other more well-off folks their age who could afford to do nothing other than smoke hashish. After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Omar followed in the footsteps of his fellow scholars and joined the resistance against the Soviet invasion. While out on the front lines, he was wounded several times, with one of the injuries resulting in the loss of his right eye. After the Soviet withdrawal, Omar largely laid low and served as the imam of a ramshackle mosque in Kandahar during the early stage of the Afghan Civil War. Around this time, a band of Taliban leaders realized that Omar's low profile and lack of political experience would, paradoxically, make him an excellent fit to be the organization's next leader. Over the next few years, the Taliban's tendency to swiftly hand out justice – much like the Nazis' SA, combined with a healthy amount of financial backing from Pakistan's ISI, made the Taliban's power and popularity grow to the point that they were eventually able to take over all of Afghanistan.⁷

⁶ Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005) 132-5.

⁷ Steve Coll, "Looking for Mullah Omar" *The New Yorker*, 23 January 2012.

Despite the prevailing narrative that the CIA was unintentionally responsible for the eventual formation of the Taliban, considerable scholarly evidence exists that the reality was nowhere near as cut-and-dry. As Michael Rubin notes, there were many other variables that made Afghanistan particularly vulnerable to the possibility of a group like the Taliban eventually seizing power. Of all these variables, none was as significant as Pakistan. As Steve Coll mentions, Pakistan's intelligence agency Inter-Services Agency (ISI) served as the chief intermediary between the CIA and the mujahedeen.⁸ Another author from the ISI side of the situation, Mohammad Yousaf, further elaborated on the relationship between the two national intelligence agencies and the mujahedeen. Emphasizing the fact that, in spite of popular opinion to the contrary, the CIA never provided training to the mujahedeen. Washington's direct involvement in the conflict was limited to providing funding and shipping weapons to Pakistan, with occasional government check-ins being provided by CIA Director William Casey and a one-time visit by Charlie Wilson.⁹ Although the CIA may have never directly trained the mujahedeen, they had plenty of blood on their hands both literally and figuratively. As Coll once again observes, just as the CIA had feared, many of the Stinger missiles supplied by the CIA eventually fell into the wrong hands after Moscow withdrew in 1989. Another major misstep and textbook example of blowback is how the ISI would later go on to use their experience in training the mujahedeen to train operatives for another flareup in Pakistan's seemingly eternal conflict with India over Kashmir.¹⁰

⁸ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 73.

⁹ Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Battle for Afghanistan: The Soviets Versus the Mujahideen during the 1980s*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 1992) 148

¹⁰ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 371.

Another common theme among scholars attempting to diminish the CIA's role in creating the Taliban is the role of the Pakistani government – specifically their intelligence agency the ISI, in enabling the Taliban to remain in power after winning the Afghan Civil War in 1996. Sean P. Winchell notes that although the Taliban appeared to be on its way to victory early on in the conflict, the eventual involvement of the ISI in the conflict¹¹ all but assured Taliban rule in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future.¹²

Yet another Pakistan-related factor whose importance to the Soviet-Afghan war cannot be denied is Bank of Credit and Commerce International, or BCCI. This institution, which appropriately enough, was founded by a Pakistani, became a rather convenient way for the CIA to launder the money that they used to fund the mujahedeen. Further corroborating these allegations is the fact that CIA director William Casey met with BCCI founder and president Agha Hasan Abedi. After Senators John Kerry and Hank Brown delivered a blistering report in 1991 exposing the numerous ties between the CIA and this controversial money-laundering institution, the BCCI suddenly found themselves discredited by the international community and ceased operations shortly after.¹³

As Peter Dale Scott points out, Pakistan, by way of the ISI, were the sole gatekeepers who decided who, among the various mujahedeen groups, would benefit from the financial support and weapons offered by the CIA. As Pakistan was initially founded as a safe haven for India's Muslims after the latter declared independence from

¹¹ Interestingly, according to Winchell, at the insistence of an American oil company.

¹² Sean P. Winchell, "Pakistan's ISI: The Invisible Government." *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 16, no. 3 (2003): 374-88.

¹³ Scott, 103-5

Great Britain, it was understandable that the ISI would have an inherent bias toward wanting one of the hardline Islamic fundamentalist groups like Hekmatyar's to succeed the Soviets in Afghanistan rather than one of the more moderate secular-leaning groups, like the one led by Masood. In fact, as Scott further observes, America had an opportunity to guarantee that the more moderate Sufi Pashtun nationalists of Afghanistan would have a bigger say by way of the national council known as a *Loya Jirga*. This steadfast preference for Islamic rule in Afghanistan would eventually totally silence these moderate Sufis¹⁴ out of the national conversation, effectively eliminating any chance for Afghanistan to become a secular, Western-style state, with Scott writing:

The United States missed an important opportunity in 1980 to rectify this fundamentalist bias. A loya jirga, or national assembly, convened to represent all of Afghanistan's divergent groups, called for a loose federal structure, nonaligned foreign policy, and nonsectarian Islam. Although the loya jirga was praised by the Christian Science Monitor for its representative character, the United States did not intervene when the ISI scuttled the venture by threatening to cut off the supply of U.S. weapons. The religious consequence of this unbalanced ISI support was that the traditional moderate Sufism that had been widespread in Afghanistan, and was represented by one of the two traditionalist parties, lost ground to the radical Salafi Islamism that was favored by Saudi Arabia as well as the ISI and its factions. 28 This mirrored a longtime evolution inside Pakistan, where traditional Sufism had also been eroded by state-assisted radical elements, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam, backed by Pakistan president Muhammad Zia-ul Haq.¹⁵

Scott then proceeds to levy even more astonishing accusations against Pakistan regarding their financial involvement in the September 11th attacks. As Scott argues, Lieutenant-General Mahmoud Ahmad, who was director of the ISI the day the planes struck the World Trade Center, ordered London-born terrorism financier Ahmed Omar

¹⁴ As followers of Islam's mystical traditions, the Sufis interpreted *jihad* to mean internal personal struggle, not the external militant warfare practiced by the mujahedin.

¹⁵ Scott, 107-8

Saeed Sheikh to wire 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta \$100,000 shortly before the attacks. Rather suspiciously, a little over a week after the September 11th attacks, President George W. Bush gave a famous speech in which he plainly warned world leaders “you are either with us, or with the terrorists.” This subsequently resulted in Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf quickly dismissing Ahmad from his post at the ISI. Even more strangely, despite the fact that numerous mainstream news publications had written about these shocking connections between Pakistan and the 9/11 hijackers, the subject was not brought up once during the congressional 9/11 Commission hearings. According to Scott, the Pakistani government was successfully able to get the 9/11 Commission to sweep these allegations under the rug by handsomely paying off lobbyists to not bring up this potentially explosive connection. Even more interesting is the fact that Daniel Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* investigative reporter who was gruesomely beheaded in Pakistan in 2002, had been utilizing Ahmad as part of his inquiry about the connections between the ISI and Islamic militants.¹⁶

The CIA-Pakistan Connection.

To sum things up, when the American government and the CIA made the initial decision to assist the mujahedeen in their jihad against the Soviet Union, Pakistan insisted that they either help whoever served their interests, or not help at all. Given America's recent experience with the revolution in Iran, the last thing anyone that Washington wanted was to have more radical Muslims on our bad side. Unfortunately for America,

¹⁶ Scott, 117-9.

given the recent transformation of Pakistani society, accomplishing this goal of assisting the more moderate members of the mujahedeen would turn out to be a rather herculean task.

Although America knew that there were certain mujahedeen leaders such as Ahmad Shah Masood that would likely pose little to no threat to the United States once the Soviet-Afghan conflict was over, Pakistan's status as the mujahedeen's trainer and financial gatekeeper meant that America's hands were effectively tied in terms of who they could and could not support in their clandestine effort to keep the Soviet Union as far away from the Middle East as possible. To America's credit, after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, the United States did everything that it could to get the more moderate mujahedeen like Masoud involved in the governance of post-Soviet Afghanistan, most importantly by inviting him to participate in the interim coalition government that would rule Afghanistan until a more stable ruler could be found.

A final important thing to keep in mind when discussing how much guilt the CIA should bear for the mujahedeen's post-Soviet actions is the fact that this was the first time they supported an opposition group that had an explicitly religious slant to it. When the CIA had previously supported anti-Communist rebels in the Cold War, these organizations were strictly secular in nature. The infusion of religion into the mix was an entire new ballgame for the American government. With that in mind, one can make the compelling argument that the "blowback" that befell the United States in the decade following the Soviet-Afghan conflict was simply a "rookie mistake" as a result of woeful inexperience dealing with militant religious groups. As we shall discuss next, institutional

ineptness played a considerable role in America failing to thwart al Qaeda from carrying out numerous attacks on American targets over the course of the following decade.

Chapter III: American Intelligence Failures and Successes

Why was America so Blind?

As the previous two chapters demonstrate, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman was not the only blind person in these early years of the War on Terror. At first glance, it is easy to chalk up America's ignorance of the Islamic terrorist threat to the fact that the terrorists who carried out attacks in the Middle East were too far from America to pose a serious threat, with the American government likely believing that Islamic terrorists were not willing to go through the trouble of flying all the way to the other side of the globe to wreak havoc. In actuality, the CIA and State Department likely simply thought that Islamic terrorists were not logistically capable of carrying out an attack on American soil, naively believing that, funds they provided the mujahedeen aside, they were likely too poor to both travel to America to carry out an attack and acquire the various materials needed to build a sufficiently dangerous bomb. Moreover, a major terrorist attack had not occurred on American soil in almost twenty years prior to the World Trade Center bombing, the last being a series of non-lethal acts of property destruction by the radical left-wing group Weather Underground.

Another thing to keep in mind was that during the 1980s, The War on Drugs was considered America's chief domestic concern, with the gang warfare resulting from the emerging crack cocaine epidemic becoming a particularly pressing public safety issue.¹

¹ Ironically enough, one of the most dangerous of these drugs, heroin and opiates/opioids, had their chief ingredient, the poppy plant, cultivated widely throughout Afghanistan.

This was not only the only problem this epidemic posed to America's inner cities, however. The highly addictive nature of this particular form of cocaine often resulted in users becoming homeless, not only becoming an economic drain on society, but also often frightening people who encountered these addicts on the streets.

Finally, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was considered by many to be the end of the last serious threat to American security. This idea that the fall of the Soviet Union would usher in a new era of global stability was famously popularized by Francis Fukuyama's 1989 essay *The End of History*, in which he predicted that the end of the Cold War would eventually result in the rest of the world adopting capitalism and liberal democracy as its' default economic and political systems.²

America continued to disregard the threat posed by Islamic terrorism even after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. One excellent example of this ignorance being called out in popular culture was during a scene in Michael Moore's 1995 satirical war movie *Canadian Bacon*, where an American general dismisses the President's suggestion of declaring war on international terrorism to increase his sagging approval ratings by saying "Well, sir, we're not going to reopen missile factories just to fight some creeps running around in exploding rental cars, are we sir?"³ Ironically, America was forced to finally improve its antiterrorism laws earlier that year when a truck bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

Andrew C. McCarthy outlines the numerous red flags that the American government ignored in the years preceding the many attacks al Qaeda carried out on

² <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>.

³ *Canadian Bacon*, DVD, Directed by Michael Moore, Dog Eat Dog Films, 1995.

American targets from 1993 to 2001. As a lawyer who was involved in the trials of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, McCarthy asserts that the gravest mistake the American government made in the early years of confronting Islamic terrorist attacks on American soil was their decision to try the terrorists in civilian, rather than military courts. As terrorist attacks are acts of war, it would only be appropriate for these religious warriors to be tried in the same court as traditional warriors.⁴

In addition, he also believes that agencies like the FBI lack the ability to prevent acts of terrorism since they are focused on solving crimes that have already been committed instead of preventing future crimes. In other words, agencies like the FBI have a more reactive approach to investigating terrorism, while agencies like the CIA have a more proactive approach. As a result, the CIA is considerably more well-suited than the FBI to prevent terrorist attacks before they happen.⁵

To the federal government's credit, McCarthy acknowledges that two years before the first attack on the Twin Towers, the FBI successfully planted former Egyptian Army officer Emad Salem as a mole in Abdel-Rahman's inner circle. However, the FBI dropped the ball yet again in this case by letting Salem out of their sight even though he was shown on video building bombs. McCarthy has a more cynical theory as to why the FBI terminated their relationship with Salem: they wanted to wash their hands of any potential liability in the event that Abdel-Rahman's group actually succeeded in carrying out an attack.⁶

⁴ Andrew C. McCarthy, *Willful Blindness: A Memoir of the Jihad*. New York: Encounter Books, 2005) 3-5.

⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid*, 9-13.

Erik J. Dahl opines that one of the biggest mistakes made by intelligence agencies over the past few decades was their emphasis on technical intelligence, such as gathering information via wiretapping or computer hacking, as opposed to human intelligence, which involves more traditional forms of espionage. Most intelligence experts agree, however, that regardless of whether one emphasizes technical or human intelligence when trying to thwart a surprise attack, terrorism poses a unique challenge to those collecting intelligence because of the scattered nature of terrorist networks compared to the more centralized nature of a military established by a government. Additionally, intelligence related to terrorism is particularly hard to come by because terrorists rely much more on the element of surprise than conventional military operations.⁷

When it came to technical intelligence, although the American intelligence community focused more on this type of intelligence-gathering, it did a fairly poor job of it. Since Islamic terrorists seldom used telecommunications to plan out their attacks, this was not a particularly useful way to gather information. When the internet came into existence later in the decade, it became a godsend for technical intelligence proponents since it made it significantly easier for terrorists around the globe to formulate their plans.

Due to this scarcity of technical intelligence when it came to gathering information about terrorist activities, human intelligence became virtually the only way to find out exactly what these terrorists were up to. Unfortunately, the CIA had virtually no clue how to infiltrate radical Islamic organizations like MAK or Hezbollah. Ironically, as

⁷ Erik J. Dahl, "Warning of Terror: Explaining the Failure of Intelligence against Terrorism." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, 2005 (1): 34-6.

shown by the actions of Ali Mohamed, the terrorists were easily able to infiltrate America's armed forces.

Reluctance to better utilize human intelligence was not the only way America made itself vulnerable to Islamic terrorism in the years immediately following the Cold War. The FBI and CIA, who have historically been the two agencies most responsible for collecting information on those wishing to do harm to America, have long been embroiled in a bitter rivalry.

As Mark Riebling explains, one interesting superficial source of animosity between the two organizations comes as a result of the contrasting cultures between the two organizations. The CIA has historically been staffed by Ivy League-educated, upper-class, and intellectual types. The FBI, on the other hand, was seen as a more blue-collar, average Joe kind of workplace, whom the CIA effectively dismissed as glorified policemen.

The CIA and FBI's relationship was not always this rocky. After the CIA's inception as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, they and the FBI kept a reasonably safe, but respectable distance from one another, with Langley focusing on overseas intelligence gathering while J. Edgar Hoover and his "G-men" aimed their sights on organized crime.

Riebling is not the only author to highlight the numerous institutional defects in the FBI and CIA that limited their capabilities to address the growing terrorist threat that emerged in the 1990s. Amy Zegart argues that the CIA was initially crippled from its inception in terms of how far its' investigative reach could extend. When the initial

Congressional proceedings occurred in 1947 to establish the Agency, the FBI and military intelligence units were vehemently opposed to the idea of a central agency consolidating two traditionally separate institutions for collecting intelligence. Additionally, with the horrors of the Holocaust fresh in everyone's minds, the CIA's wings were clipped from the get-go in order to (understandably) prevent the agency from mutating into an American version of the Gestapo.

In addition, Zegart highlights several examples of where the federal government, not only the FBI, was slow to technologically adapt to changing times. Some rather humorous examples include the fact that the U.S. Army maintained a horse cavalry right up through World War II, that American customs officers asked incoming large vessels how many cannons they had on board up to the mid-1990s, and that the U.S. Agriculture Department was required by federal law to maintain field offices within a day's horseback ride of anywhere in the continental United States. At the FBI, the situation was not much better, as the majority of the agency's computers were embarrassingly obsolete, an unforgivable sin during the period when the internet was coming of age. To paint a picture of just how obsolete the FBI's computers were during this time-period, they relied on function keys in order to input commands instead of the point-and-click system used with mice, not to mention that most of the computers were so slow that faxes were preferable to emails for sending vital information. Another major related technological difficulty which plagued the FBI's gradual transition to a mostly paperless workplace was the fact that approximately half of the FBI's six billion pages of records were still being stored as paper files instead of on computers.

Another important weakness that Zegart cites regarding why government agencies like the FBI and CIA are relatively slow to adapt to change is the fact that, unlike the private sector, government bureaucracies do not have to worry about potentially going out of business if they fail to keep up with the times. In addition, unlike businesses, who are solely controlled by those who want them to succeed, the two-party system that exists in the United States means that the opposing party to whomever is currently in power would benefit considerably if government agencies fail to live up to the expectations of their citizens. Another problem that arises concerning the ability of the FBI and CIA to adapt to change comes from the reluctance of two of the three branches of the government to push for institutional reform. The President, for example, is surprisingly relatively weak in terms of what he can do to reform government agencies considering how much he has to get done in a minimum of four years, barring a major crisis/scandal involving one of these agencies (ex. Watergate). In regards to the legislative branch, although they are not bound by term limits like the President is, they nonetheless have their own series of hurdles to overcome if they wanted to get serious about institutional reform within the federal bureaucracy. The biggest of these obstacles is the fact that members of Congress have a much closer connection to their constituents than the President. Accordingly, the average American voter has little to no concern about what the FBI and/or CIA is up to, which means that, compared to the countless other concerns that the average member of Congress has to deal with, the day-to-day operations and

culture of the FBI and CIA were way at the back of the line in terms of vital matters to federal legislators.⁸

All of these above examples show that inter-agency conflict was not the only stumbling block the federal government encountered when it came to how it could prevent acts of terrorism. Embarrassingly outdated technology and the inability for either Congress or the President to enact meaningful bureaucratic reforms before they become a problem also have historically prevented the federal government from efficiently combating terrorist threats both foreign and domestic.

The Watergate scandal proved to be a watershed moment when it came to the American public's view of the federal government. One of the biggest blows to the American public's trust in the federal government was the revelation that Nixon regularly utilized both the FBI *and* the CIA for his own political gain. Congress reacted by establishing the Church and Pike Commissions, whose subsequent exposure of the CIA's assassinations of foreign leaders only increased the public's skepticism of CIA activities. This resulted in the FBI and CIA being kept more further apart than at any other point in their history, which ended up having the unfortunate unintended side effect of leaving the United States particularly vulnerable to outside threats.⁹

One of the first historical examples that exposed the communications gap between the FBI and CIA was the infamous Jonestown massacre. When Congressman Leo Ryan

⁸ Amy Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, The FBI, and the Origins of 9/11* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁹ Mark Riebling, *Wedge: From Pearl Harbor to 9/11: How the Secret War between the FBI and CIA has Endangered National Security*.

decided to investigate the activities of Jones' People's Temple, the FBI and CIA thought the other agency was responsible for investigating the cult.

The passage of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) further limited what could be done with the information they obtained from radio operator Mike Carter. Passed in response to a series of scandals stemming from the CIA opening people's letters without a warrant, the Act required a request be submitted in writing to a special court specifically designated to issue the necessary warrants required to collect evidence on suspects. The fact that the penalties for violating FISA were prohibitively harsh made agents from both the FBI and CIA reluctant to do anything that could even remotely be construed as violating the Act.

As previously mentioned, this reluctance by the FBI and CIA to further investigate the goings-on at Jonestown resulted in Congressman Bryan and NBC News taking matters into their own hands. When they arrived in Jonestown, tragedy quickly unfolded, as both Congressman Bryan and the NBC News camera crew were shot to death by members of People's Temple. After this, all of the members of Jones' deranged cult infamously either voluntarily drank or were forcibly injected with poisoned Kool-Aid/Flavor-Aid. The Jonestown case made this FBI/CIA dichotomy particularly complex since the cult had temples in two separate locations. In an ideal world, the FBI, which normally is responsible for investigating activities within United States borders, should have handled the investigation of the People's Temple's operations in San Francisco,

while the CIA, which is normally tasked with monitoring overseas activities, would have investigated what was happening at the main Jonestown in Equatorial Guyana.¹⁰

Any hopes that the relationship between the two agencies would improve in the near future were quickly dashed when William J. “Bill” Casey was appointed Director of Central intelligence in 1981. Casey’s appointment as CIA chief proved to be a godsend for the previously-mentioned neoconservative movement, as Casey sympathized with their belief that America was ordained by a higher power to become the world’s sole superpower.¹¹ Like OSS founder “Wild” Bill Donovan, Casey harbored a deep distrust of the FBI. This likely stemmed from the time after World War II when he worked at Donovan’s law firm.

Another event that certainly further confirmed his suspicions about the Bureau were allegations levied against Casey by the FBI. As Ronald Reagan’s campaign manager during the 1980 presidential election, he supposedly supplied Chief of Staff Jim Baker with then-President Jimmy Carter’s briefing papers before one of their debates.

Although Casey despised the FBI, he had to cooperate with them regardless. He took the job specifically to exert greater personal power over American foreign policy, as the saying goes, “with great power comes great responsibility”. In spite of this promise to cooperate, the CIA began to increasingly conduct surveillance within America’s borders, a jurisdiction which was traditionally considered to squarely be FBI territory.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear*, YouTube, Directed by Adam Curtis, Performed by Adam Curtis. United Kingdom: BBC, 2007.

The first test of the FBI and CIA's newfound ability to cooperate with one another came in 1982, when the two agencies joined forces in a historic effort to poach KGB agents directly from their Washington station. In 1983, the French embassy in Moscow alerted the State Department that they had discovered bugging equipment in their building. As American embassies are considered to legally be American soil, the FBI was authorized to launch an investigation into possible Soviet surveillance efforts there. One of the more startling discoveries that came from this investigation was the revelation that a Soviet emigrant who was later revealed to have been a KGB agent was chosen as the embassy's design engineer. The CIA subsequently steadfastly denied that it was possible for the Soviets to infiltrate the embassy in the ways that the FBI had suggested, which included such ludicrous methods as enlarging chimneys so that midgets or small children could sneak into the building or using a "Soviet Spider-Man" to scale the walls of the complex.

The CIA discovered that a trainee named Edward Lee Howard, who went by the cryptonym "Robert", was very likely to be the mole. Red flags were apparent as early as in 1983, when a polygraph test revealed that Mr. Howard had stolen from a woman's purse on a commercial flight and used cocaine while employed by the Agency. Even more suspicious was the discovery the following year that he had spent considerable time loitering around the Soviet embassy in Washington. These failures by the CIA to report such alarming behavior in an effort to save face were not only idiotic, but also illegal.¹²

¹² *Ibid.*

1985 in general was an embarrassing year for the CIA and would come to be known as *The Year of the Spy* due to the unusual number of foreign agents that were arrested in America's borders that year. Riebling rightfully points out that foreign governments such as China and the Soviet Union were able to do an excellent job infiltrating America's intelligence network.

Moscow was not the only party guilty of planting spies at Langley, however, as Beijing also successfully managed to infiltrate the Agency during the waning decades of the Cold War. One example was Larry Wu-Tai Chin, who subsequently admitted to being a spy for communist China for over thirty years. This discovery was only made after a mole the CIA had planted in China tipped off the CIA that an American spy had suspiciously visited the country for a banquet, which resulted in the FBI discovering a customs declaration signed by him after going through airline records. Further adding to the CIA's humiliation/embarrassment was the fact that they had asked him to end his three-year retirement the following year and come back as a consultant, even though the FBI had begun investigating Chin's suspicious travels in 1983.¹³

The FBI was not the only government agency to have communication difficulties with the CIA. Omar Abdel-Rahman's entrance into the United States reveals this problem. The State Department eventually admitted in a 1993 closed hearing before Congress that a lack of communication between them and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) resulted in Abdel-Rahman being issued a visa in spite of not being subjected to a background check. The State Department would explain this issue

¹³ *Ibid.*

away by blaming it on the primitive immigration and visa system in Sudan. Furthermore, the book goes on to explain how gross technological inadequacy also played a part in Abdel-Rahman being mistakenly allowed to enter the United States, as the data used to vet visa applicants was stored on microfiche instead of as a computer file.¹⁴

Ramzi Yousef and Omar Abdel-Rahman publicly declared during their trials that the ultimate aim of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing was to topple one of the Twin Towers into the other, which would have caused devastation the like of which New York City had never seen. As hard as it is to fathom, the destruction wrought by the WTC bombers could have actually been worse. Jonathan B. Tucker made the astonishing revelation that the World Trade Center bombers had put sodium cyanide into the bomb with the intent of creating a deadly cloud of hydrogen cyanide that would have quickly swept up the North Tower and killed everyone inside. This fact was first brought to light by federal judge Kevin Duffy at the 1994 sentencing of four of the bombers, but was for the most part ignored until March of 1996, when a Senate Committee on Government Affairs hearing echoed these suspicions.

One of those bombers at the sentencing meted out by Judge Duffy was Nidal Ayyad, a Rutgers University graduate who worked as a chemical engineer. In a rather crafty move, Ayyad used company stationery from his chemical engineer job at Allied Signal to purchase ingredients for the explosives without raising suspicion. Even more galling was the fact that Ayyad stayed behind and served as the group's spokesman immediately after the attack, while all of his co-conspirators had already fled the country.

¹⁴ Julie Farnam, *U.S. Immigration Laws Under the Threat of Terrorism*. (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005) 6-7.

During this time continued to use his job connections to attempt to purchase chemicals for another attack that, he and his group hoped, would be far more successful than the World Trade Center one. In spite of all of this, the only evidence supporting the claim cyanide was used in the attack was a lone bottle found in Ayyad's shed that was far too small to be used lethally in a bombing.¹⁵¹⁶

¹⁵ John V Parachini, "The World Trade Center Bombers (1993)." *Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist use of Chemical and Biological Weapons* (2000): 185-206.

¹⁶ After the tragic bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, the federal government finally realized that terrorism, whether foreign or domestic, was an issue that needed to be taken seriously. The result was the passage of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act the following year which established the criteria by which the State Department designated terrorist organizations and made it a federal crime to either belong to a terrorist organization or raise funds for one. The latter two provisions would garner considerable controversy on the grounds that they infringed on Americans' First Amendment rights to freedom of association and freedom of speech. Andy Pearson compares the provisions outlawing membership in terrorist organizations and banning fundraising by terrorist groups within America's borders to the infamous "blacklists" that were created during the infamous Red Scare of the 1950s. Pearson also saw similarities in the Act to the race-based immigration laws that began to be passed by Congress during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and the frequent accusations by the Attorneys General of Southern states during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that the NAACP was conspiring to violently overthrow the American government. Another potential pitfall of the fundraising ban in the AEDPA is that, in many instances, legitimate humanitarian organizations may have either direct or indirect ties to a terrorist organization. One particularly notable application of this predicament was in South Africa during the 1980s, when the African National Congress, the leading organization in the fight against apartheid, was ruled by Congress to be a terrorist organization. Another provision of the AEDPA that would cause widespread criticism in legal circles is the unprecedented restrictions the Act placed on the habeas corpus rights of convicted terrorists. For the first time in the nation's history, a statute of limitations was imposed on how long someone convicted of committing an act of terrorism had to file a writ of habeas corpus (one year), as well as only receiving one chance to appeal their imprisonment. Prior to this, the only other time restrictions were ever placed on habeas corpus were during times of war. Naturally, such a draconian rewriting of America's habeas corpus laws brought out numerous challenges, reviews, and appeals in regard to the law's constitutionality.

Deborah Stahlkopf believed that Congress did not directly intend to restrict that particular right to such an extreme intent, it nonetheless overstepped its boundaries in the name of, as the author frequently describes it, "preventing abuse of the writ". In the Supreme Court case *Felker v. Turpin* decided later in 1996, in which a man in Georgia was sentenced to death for raping and murdering a woman, it was determined that the Act legally prevented both the federal and state courts from entertaining additional habeas corpus petitions if the claim was also present in a prior application. The case concurrently ruled that the AEDPA's habeas corpus provisions did not the Suspension Clause of the United States Constitution.

Despite all of these unprecedented measures taken by the federal government in order to prevent another terrorist attack, whether by a foreign or domestic enemy, on either American soil or overseas American properties, it still tragically was not enough to stop al Qaeda from continuing to wreak havoc on America's interests both home and abroad.

America's next brush with al Qaeda came in 1996, when a truck bomb exploded outside of the Khobar Towers housing complex that was boarding Coalition soldiers who were enforcing a no-fly-zone that was being imposed on Iraq. After the attack, official blame for the attack was placed on Hezbollah and Iran, although the attack was actually carried out by a pro-Khomeini Saudi group which, despite being also called Hezbollah, had no other connections besides possible financial assistance to the more well-known Hezbollah based out of Lebanon. However, the 9/11 Commission indicated that al Qaeda may well have been behind the attack since Osama bin Laden was seen being congratulated on the day it occurred.

A *New York Times* article published a few months after the attack pointed to several several lapses in both judgement and intelligence. The CIA and Air Force had grossly underestimated the bombing capabilities of the perpetrators, as seen in the size of multiple bombings that had been carried out throughout Saudi Arabia in the months preceding the Khobar Towers attack. In addition, the United States Air Force ignored recommendations made by the Pentagon to improve the security of the Khobar Towers in the aftermath of a car bombing near the U.S. embassy in Riyadh in November of the previous year to enlarge the defense perimeter of the base from its current distance of eighty feet, and install plastic protective film on the windows of the complex in order to prevent glass from becoming a danger. What makes these security errors even more baffling is that the infamous 1983 bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut should have increased security measures at all of America's military bases around the globe. The CIA and the Pentagon's were completely clueless as to how dangerous the underground

militant groups operating in Saudi Arabia at the time were.¹⁷ At the same time, it should be noted that the Saudi authorities, who should have kept a closer eye on the militant groups that existed within their borders, were steadfastly in denial that any such groups existed.

Al Qaeda's next attack on an American target was its bombing of the United States embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. These attacks also made the larger American public aware of Osama bin Laden's existence at this time, as he was added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, where he would remain until his death in 2011. As Dilip Hiro explains, suicide bombings such as these became increasingly popular with Islamic terrorists due to the fact that the death of the perpetrator make it exponentially difficult for investigators to determine both who was responsible for the attack and their motive, thereby allowing the responsible organization to carry out more attacks unabated.¹⁸ It is also worth noting that the miniseries adaptation of Wright's *Looming Tower* showed that the previously mentioned lack of communication between the CIA and FBI was a chief reason the embassy bombing were not stopped in advance.¹⁹

One of the chief reasons the embassy bombings surprised terrorism experts was the fact that they took place in East Africa, a comfortable distance from the Middle East, where one would typically expect an Islamic terrorist attack to be carried out. At the same time, Copeland reminds the reader that a *fatwa* issued by Osama bin Laden earlier in the

¹⁷ Douglas Jehl, John Kifner, and Eric Schmitt, "FATAL LAPSES -- A Special Report.;How U.S. Missteps and Delay Opened Door to Saudi Blast." *The New York Times*, 7 July 1996. Accessed March 29, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/07/world/fatal-lapses-special-report-us-missteps-delay-opened-door-saudi-blast.html>.

¹⁸ Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and Global Response*. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014) 271.

¹⁹ Wright, *Looming Tower* (2018).

year declaring war on the United States should have put the authorities on higher alert. That being said, Copeland understands that the United States did not prioritize security, making them a particularly easy and vulnerable target for al Qaeda. This is astounding considering that American embassies were not on heightened alert since terrorists had already attacked US embassies in both Beirut and Riyadh.^{20 21}

The last al Qaeda attack on an American target before the September 11th attacks was the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Aden, Yemen, while the ship was undergoing a routine refueling. The attack was technically a homecoming of sorts for al Qaeda, as Osama bin Laden was originally from Yemen. Happening suspiciously close to the controversial 2000 Presidential election, the attack may have been intended to affect the outcome of said election. As Lawrence Wright proceeds to explain, the fact that the government of Yemen was stubbornly protective of its own image made it unusually difficult for the American government to begin investigating the attack. To give an example from the book of how much of a hard time Yemen gave the FBI, they actually had the gall to demand that they pay them \$1 million to dredge the sludge around the site of the blast.²² This kind of snobbish behavior on the part of the Yemeni government should not really come as that much of a surprise considering the fact that Saudi Arabia, Yemen's immediate neighbor to the north, had long been in steadfast denial that any extremist groups were operating within their borders.

²⁰ Copeland, *Fool Me Twice*, 163-6.

²¹ It is also interesting to note that, according to a 2002 article in *The New York Times Magazine*, this attack on those two embassies in Africa very well may never have happened had another attack aiming to kill the members of both the English and American national soccer teams during the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France not been broken up an astonishing two weeks before the tournament was set to begin.

²² Wright, 325.

Like Zegart, Lahneman also agrees with the general consensus of intelligence experts since the attacks that the CIA's human intelligence capabilities when it came to hunting down al Qaeda were woefully inadequate. This relates to the longstanding American emphasis on freedom in that in the years leading up to 9/11, the CIA went to great lengths to ensure that the operatives on their payroll had not been previously been found guilty of human rights violations, even if they were proven to be more effective than operatives with clean records. This "better safe than sorry" approach to human intelligence by the CIA would obviously come back to haunt the United States on that tragic September morning. In addition, the covert intelligence operations of the CIA were also reduced greatly in the years before 9/11, likely as a result of public backlash over the Iran-Contra fiasco.²³ In spite of this, a well-carried out covert plan involving, say Masood's Northern Alliance, in getting al Qaeda out of Afghanistan would have likely saved the lives of countless American servicemen and women and their allies.

In summation, a combination of communication difficulties between the FBI, CIA, and State Department, embarrassingly obsolete technology, and the unwillingness of government officials to occasionally push the Bill of Rights to the wayside for the sake of national security proved to make a sitting duck for Islamic terrorists. Fortunately, however, the American government was able to successfully prevent several potential major terrorist attacks from being carried out.

Intelligence Successes

²³Steven C. Boraz, and Thomas C. Bruneau, eds., *Reforming Intelligence: Obstacles to Democratic Control and Effectiveness* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) 74-82.

Much criticism has deservedly been levied on the American federal government for their mishandling of information and intelligence concerning the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the September 11th attacks. Yet the government was able to successfully prevent several attacks planned for the American homeland throughout the 1990s. It is noteworthy that the perpetrators of the successful attacks overseas (i.e. 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, 1998 Embassy bombings, and 2000 bombing of USS Cole in Yemen) never set foot in the United States, making it impossible for the FBI to find out anything about their plans.

Although America first became acquainted with al Qaeda through the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, serendipity prevented us from learning about them even earlier. In December of 1992, members of the U.S. Marines were stationed in Yemen on their way to Somalia to participate in Operation Restore Hope, a military action made famous by the film *Black Hawk Down*. The terrorists planted the bomb to kill the Marines but only ended up killing an Austrian tourist and a hotel employee and injuring four other Austrians. Fortunately, the Marines avoided harm as they had reported to Somalia just prior to the attack.²⁴ The American authorities reacted by making sure future troop reinforcements headed to Somalia were stationed in a safer country.²⁵

According to Peter Bergen, American intelligence officials had begun to suspect bin Laden of having a role in these bombings as early as April 1993. No further action

²⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "1992 Yemen hotel bombings," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1992_Yemen_hotel_bombings&oldid=832263393 (accessed April 2, 2018).

²⁵ Wright, 198.

was taken to look into any further risk this rather suspicious figure may have posed to the United States.²⁶

The next scheme was the NYC landmark bomb plot, an event that resulted in the arrest of Omar “The Blind Sheikh” Abdel-Rahman. This plot, which was foiled in 1993, consisted of blowing up several well-known New York City landmarks and transportation hubs such as the Lincoln and Holland tunnels as well as the United Nations headquarters. It also involved the assassinations of both United States Senator Alfonse D’Amato (R-NY) and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the latter of which was scheduled to visit New York City for the annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly.²⁷ Emad Salem, the previously mentioned former FBI informant played a key role in foiling the attacks by providing the terrorists with phony bomb material.²⁸

Another major potential attack the FBI and CIA were able to successfully prevent was the infamous Operation Bojinka plot. This plot, which was planned to be global in scope, would have involved blowing up eleven airliners bound for the United States, crashing a plane into the CIA’s headquarters in Langley, Virginia, and using a suicide bomber disguised as a priest to assassinate Pope John Paul II while he was on a trip to the Philippines. Like the NYC landmark bomb plot, the Bojinka plot was stopped only a few days before it was supposed to take place. The attack was stopped when authorities captured Abdul Hakim Murad after he accidentally started a fire in his Manila apartment

²⁶ Bergen, *Holy War Inc.*, 176.

²⁷ Steven Lee Myers, "Man in New Jersey Is Charged in Plot to Kill Mubarak." *The New York Times*, 18 July 1993. Accessed March 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/18/nyregion/man-in-new-jersey-is-charged-in-plot-to-kill-mubarak.html>.

²⁸ Peter Lance, "Salem: The Man Who Risked His Life for America." *Peterlance.com*. May 23, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2018. <http://peterlance.com/wordpress/?p=629>.

while making explosives for the attack. Upon his arrest by the Manila Police, Murad claimed the explosions were a result of firecrackers.

Additionally, Ramzi Yousef planted a bomb under the seat of a jetliner to test whether or not the bombs they planned to plant on the America-bound planes would successfully detonate. The test blast killed a Japanese businessman but did not destroy the aircraft. Yousef thereafter decided to proceed with the attack. However, the aforementioned accidental explosion in the Manila apartment that resulted in Murad's arrest would also end up being Yousef's undoing.

Yousef confessed to the entire Bojinka plot during his subsequent investigation by the FBI. He also planned to assassinate then-U.S. President Bill Clinton on an upcoming trip to Manila by planting a bomb under a bridge that the Presidential motorcade was scheduled to cross.²⁹ Astonishingly, measures to better screen for bombs aboard aircraft cabins would not be implemented until the summer of 2006, which resulted in the current restrictions on liquids being carried aboard airliners in a plot to blow up several transatlantic flights.

The link between al Qaeda and the Philippines dates as far back as 1988, when Osama bin Laden allegedly sent his brother-in-law Mohammad Jamal Khalifa to the Philippines to recruit new members of the mujahedeen from the ranks of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Like Wael Hamza Julaidan, Jamal Khalifa used a local charity, named the Islamic International Relief Organization (IIRO) as a front for his schemes. However, the greater Filipino connection to the Bojinka plot came courtesy of

²⁹ Mark Ensalaco, *Middle Eastern Terrorism: From Black September to September 11* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 201-2.

the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The ASG's founder, Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalan, had undergone training at al Qaeda's camp in Peshawar, where he became personally acquainted with bin Laden and became a close friend of Ramzi Yousef. As a result of this close relationship, Yousef traveled to the Philippines by way of Malaysia, where he then proceeded to train twenty terrorists and establish the cell that was supposed to carry out the Bojinka plot.³⁰

Saudi Arabia also played an important role in radicalizing Muslims not in both the Philippines and Southeast Asia as a whole. Saudi Arabia's vast oil wealth enabled that country to establish Islamic religious schools known as *madrassas* throughout the world. These madrassas propagated the controversial Wahhabi school of Islam to new generations of Muslims throughout the world.

The FBI was also able to unravel the Millennium bomb plot in December of 1999. This particular scheme began to unravel when Ahmed Rassam was pulled over by an observant customs inspector at the U.S.-Canada border crossing in Port Angeles, Washington. The customs inspector noticed how suspiciously profusely he was sweating. Rassam had previously taken up residence in Montreal in order to escape the civil unrest that had been plaguing his native Algeria.³¹ Upon further interrogation, he admitted that he was en route to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in order to blow it up as part of a worldwide plan to ruin the millennium celebrations for thousands of people. Upon further investigation by both the FBI and the CIA, it was revealed that the terrorists had

³⁰ Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Role of Philippine—American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 2 (2002): 300-1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798598>.

³¹ Montreal was a popular destination for Algerian nationals due to the large Francophone population there, as French is the primary language spoken in Algeria.

also intended to attack Disneyland in Anaheim, California, and the Space Needle in Seattle. The mayor of Seattle went so far as to cancel the New Year's Eve celebrations that were scheduled to take place at the Space Needle. Rassam was found with several Casio watches on his person, which happened to be the same timepieces he had intended to use as detonators in the foiled Bojinka plot several years earlier.³²

Another al Qaeda cell attempted to blow up the destroyer *USS The Sullivans* while it was docked in the port of Aden in Yemen for refueling on January 3, 2000. But the boat carrying the explosives prematurely sank before it could explode next to the ship.³³ This failed attack very likely influenced al Qaeda's decision to try blowing up a ship there again. Al Qaeda bombed the *USS Cole* in that same port later that year.

The most well-known foiled terrorist attack, at least from a local point of view, is far and away the infamous Lackawanna Seven plot in 2002. As the name suggests, this conspiracy consisted of seven men of Yemeni descent who resided in the city of Lackawanna, just outside of Buffalo, New York. The Yemenis began to immigrate to Lackawanna in the 1950s, where they began to get jobs in the Bethlehem Steel plant. When the Lackawanna Seven first arrived in Western New York, they attended religious services at a local mosque where Kemal Derwish, had begun giving sermons to the community. Derwish was a fellow Yemeni who would later be killed in a drone strike in Yemen along with the alleged mastermind of the USS Cole bombing.

³² Richard Sale, "Terrorists Targeted Disneyland, Space Needle." *United Press International*, 20 February 2001. Accessed March 30, 2018. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/2001/02/20/Terrorists-targeted-Disneyland-Space-Needle/9610982645200/>.

³³ Dennis Piskiewicz, *Terrorism's War with America: A History (first ed.)* (Westport: Praeger, 2003) 123.

One of the reasons Derwish's meetings were so appealing to the Lackawanna Seven was that Derwish frequently brought up the various ways in which their fellow Muslims were being oppressed across the globe. Shortly afterwards, a visiting imam from the Midwest implored them that the only way their souls could be saved was to undergo military training – specifically in Afghanistan. Looking for greater meaning in their lives than the current nine-to-five routine that the men had been following, they embarked for Afghanistan in April 2001 under the guise of going to Pakistan for religious studies. While there, they actually met and were addressed by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri themselves. However, they left before actually completing their training. In any event, the tragic events of September 11th eventually resulted in the passage of the controversial PATRIOT Act, which granted the federal government with unprecedented powers to wiretap American citizens. As a result, when the FBI began to notice that members of the plot had frequently used the word “wedding”, a long-time codeword among Islamic terrorists for an attack in emails sent to each other, the FBI eventually was able to arrest the Lackawanna Seven.³⁴ After a brief trial, they were convicted of providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization and sentenced to up to ten years in prison.

In spite of the fact that Pakistan played a considerable role in allowing the men who would eventually form the core of both the Taliban and al Qaeda to come together, not to mention the fact that the CIA should have pushed Pakistan much harder to allow them to decide who specifically received their money and weapons, they are not the only parties responsible for the existence of these two organizations. Now it is time to finally

³⁴ Mitchell D. Silber, *The Al Qaeda Factor: Plots Against the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 260-70.

determine, once and for all, who ultimately bears the most responsibility for creating al Qaeda and the Taliban

Conclusion

As we have seen over the past few chapters, there are many different factors that ultimately resulted in the eventual creation of al Qaeda and the Taliban. This beckons the question: out of all of these various factors, which was most responsible for them becoming as powerful as they did in the 1990s?

As previously mentioned, the bulk of the American population has come to believe that the responsibility for the creation of al Qaeda and the Taliban falls largely on the shoulders of the CIA as it was willing to do anything to guarantee the failure of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Other, less cynical observers who consider the CIA to be the main party responsible for al Qaeda and the Taliban's rise to power believe that the decision to help the mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviet Union was a well-intentioned but poorly implemented humanitarian gesture. In defense of those who take the humanitarian approach, this was the first time in its history that the CIA had lent their assistance to a militant Islamic organization, so it was not aware of the possibility that the beneficiaries of their aid could someday turn their back on them. Lastly, it is quite important to note that only the Shiites were viewed in both the United States and the remainder of the Western world as "bad Muslims" in the wake of the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and further bolstered by Hezbollah's 1983 bombing of a U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. The Sunnis of the world were far less associated with terrorism at that time.

This brings us to Pakistan. While this nation had largely been a secular and peaceful ally of the United States for most of its' existence, a radical change in government at roughly the same time Ayatollah Khomeini was consolidating his power in

Tehran transformed the nation into an effective theocracy. Pakistan, an Islamic republic supported any and all individuals and organizations that could help boost the image of Islam across the globe, something that would go on to have far-reaching and lethal consequences for decades to come. Pakistan under repeatedly warned the United States that further involvement with the Taliban would cause serious problems. Despite this warning from Pakistan, it is well worth remembering that this very country, during this time, was basically using both the Taliban and al Qaeda against their longtime archnemesis India.

Much of CIA's fault in failing to prevent 9/11, as previously mentioned, was due to their founder's plans for the agency to avoid become "secret police.". At the same time, it is also important to remember that the long-running "rivalry" between the CIA and FBI did a tremendous disservice to American security, as greater communication between the two agencies would no doubt have resulted in thousands of lives being saved. The CIA should also have tried to improve their relationship with the State Department, which would have likely resulted in such individuals as Omar "The Blind Sheikh" Abdel-Rahman from entering the United States. The State Department, much like the, FBI should also have done a considerably better job of staying up to date on the latest technological advancements in order to keep themselves a step ahead of America's enemies. Moreover, the FBI was generally unable prevent terrorist acts before they could be carried out, since their primary job is to investigate crimes after they have been committed. This limit was imposed on the FBI in order to prevent it from becoming too powerful.

Religious ideology also played an important role in justifying these attacks in the eyes of the terrorists. Al Qaeda and similar groups would not have a plausible reason to carry out their attacks without the radical works of such writers as Sayyid Qutb, who, after visiting America and concluding that it was a cesspool of vice and hedonistic debauchery, believed that the West's only hope of salvation was to either convert to Islam or perish. In addition, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's successor as leader of al Qaeda, began his career as a terrorist as the leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, one of the most infamous terrorist organizations in the Middle East and a longtime nuisance to Egypt's well-known Muslim Brotherhood which in contrast has long sought to establish Islamic theocracies throughout the world by peaceful political means. Also the numerous madrassas that operated throughout the Middle East and were funded by countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia tended to use a curriculum that was considerably biased in favor of such orthodox Islamic schools as Wahhabism and Salafism. Many terrorist groups were Wahhabi or Salafi in orientation and used the schools to find new recruits.

American foreign policy was also another important motivating factor in al Qaeda's decision to attack the United States. Typically, America's decision to station troops in Saudi Arabia leading up to the first Gulf War is usually the first policy blunder brought up when discussing reasons groups like al Qaeda despised America. Another major aspect of American foreign policy that has long bothered the bulk of the Muslims living in the Middle East is our steadfast support of Israel since the nation's founding in 1948. One of the first notable public examples of a Middle Eastern country publicly punishing America for their support of Israel was when Saudi Arabia cut off American access to their cheap oil in retaliation for their support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War.

The oil embargo resulted in a sharp spike in energy prices throughout the United States and briefly plunged the nation into recession, as well as initiating America's long-term decline as a global economic superpower. Another Islamic nation that had publicly denounced America's support of Israel is Iran. Iran to this day refers to the US as "the great Satan" because of its' special relationship with Israel. The terrorists themselves have often been motivated by anti-Semitism. For instance, Ramzi Yousef, the 1993 World Trade Center bomber, testified that the attack was originally planned to be carried out in Brooklyn, because they believed more Jews would be killed in an attack there. Further proof of the role anti-Semitism has played in their animosity towards the United States is the fact that Sayyid Nosair, one of the terrorists convicted in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, was also accused of assassinating controversial Orthodox Jewish rabbi Meir Kahane.

Although most people believe that the Taliban and al Qaeda were a "Frankenstein monster" created by the CIA, they were only half to blame for their evolution from a ragtag band of freedom fighters bent on expelling the Soviet Union from their homeland at all costs to one of the most infamous theocratic regimes and terrorist organizations, respectively, in recent history. The other chief guilty party responsible for enabling the Taliban and al Qaeda to become as strong as it has is Pakistan. Pakistan was determined to help out whoever would attack India, their archnemesis. Pakistan also backed the Taliban and al Qaeda given their common sympathy for ultraconservative Islam around the world. Regardless, the CIA made major mistakes, such as failing to insist on Pakistan and the ISI backing more moderate fighters such as Ahmad Shah Masood, instead of fundamentalist mujahedeen such as Hekmatyar. Therefore, there is no real single

“smoking gun” when it comes to who is responsible for al Qaeda and the Taliban coming to power. In addition, the deeply entrenched cultures of the FBI and CIA make it virtually impossible to reform them to the point they would be able to effectively communicate with each other. This, combined with the fact that Islam was the only viable belief system to the Afghani people in the absence of communism means that fundamentalist Islam will continue to be a problem for the Western world for the foreseeable future.

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