

# Informed Comment

Thoughts on the Middle East, History, and Religion

Juan Cole is President of the Global Americana Institute

Tuesday, August 02, 2005

Fisking the "War on Terror"

Once upon a time, a dangerous radical gained control of the US Republican Party.



Reagan increased the budget for support of the radical Muslim Mujahidin conducting terrorism against the Afghanistan government to **half a billion dollars a year.**



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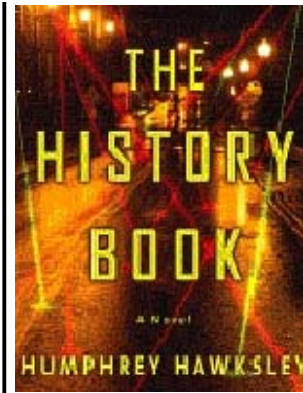
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One fifth of the money, which the CIA mostly turned over to Pakistani military intelligence to distribute, went to Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, a violent extremist who as a youth used to throw acid on the faces of unveiled girls in Afghanistan.

Not content with creating a vast terrorist network to harass the Soviets, **Reagan then pressured the late King Fahd of Saudi Arabia** to match US contributions. He had earlier imposed on Fahd to give money to the Contras in Nicaragua, some of which was used to create rightwing death squads. (Reagan liked to sidestep Congress in creating private terrorist organizations for his foreign policy purposes, which he branded "freedom fighters," giving terrorists the idea that it was all right to inflict vast damage on civilians in order to achieve their goals).



Fahd was a timid man and resisted Reagan's instructions briefly, but finally gave in to enormous US pressure.



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Fahd not only put Saudi government money into the Afghan Mujahideen networks, which trained them in bomb making and guerrilla tactics, but he also instructed the Minister of Intelligence, Turki al-Faisal, to try to raise money from private sources.



Turki al-Faisal checked around and discovered that a young member of the fabulously wealthy Bin Laden construction dynasty, Usama, was committed to Islamic causes. Turki thus gave Usama the task of raising money from Gulf millionaires for the Afghan struggle. This whole effort was undertaken, remember, on Reagan Administration instructions.

Bin Laden not only raised millions for the effort, but helped encourage Arab volunteers to go fight for Reagan against the Soviets and the Afghan communists. The Arab volunteers included people like Ayman al-Zawahiri, a young physician who had been jailed for having been involved in the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar El-Sadat. Bin Laden kept a database of these volunteers. In Arabic the word for base is al-Qaeda.

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In the US, the Christian Right adopted the Mujahideen as their favorite project. They even sent around a "biblical checklist" for grading US congressman as to how close they were to the "Christian" political line. If a congressman didn't support the radical Muslim Muj, he or she was downgraded by the evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Reagan wanted to give more and more sophisticated weapons to the Mujahideen ("freedom fighters"). The Pakistani generals were forming an alliance with the fundamentalist Jamaat-i Islam and beginning to support madrasahs or hardline seminaries that would teach Islamic extremism. But even they balked at giving the ragtag Muj really advanced weaponry. Pakistan had a close alliance with China, and took advice from Beijing.



In 1985 Reagan sent Senator Orrin Hatch, Undersecretary of Defense Fred Iklé and others to Beijing to ask China to put pressure on Pakistan to allow the US to give the Muslim radicals, such as Hikmatyar, more sophisticated weapons. Hatch succeeded in this mission.

By giving the Muj weaponry like the stinger shoulderheld missile, which could destroy advanced Soviet arms like their helicopter gunships, Reagan demonstrated to the radical Muslims that they could defeat a super power.



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Reagan also decided to build up Saddam Hussein in Iraq as a counterweight to Khomeinist Iran, authorizing US and Western companies to send him precursors for chemical and biological weaponry. At one point Donald Rumsfeld was sent to Iraq to assure Saddam that it was all right if he used chemical weapons against the Iranians. Reagan had no taste in friends.



On becoming president, George H. W. Bush made a deal with the Soviets that he would cut the Mujahideen off if the Soviets would leave Afghanistan. The last Soviet troops departed in early 1989. The US then turned its back on Afghanistan and allowed it to fall into civil war, as the radical Muslim factions fostered by Washington and Riyadh turned against one another and used their extensive

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weaponry on each other and on civilians.

In the meantime, Saddam, whom the US had built up as a major military power, invaded Kuwait. The Bush senior administration now had to take on its former protege, and put hundreds of thousands of US troops into the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. The radical Muslim extremists with whom Reagan and Bush had allied in Afghanistan now turned on the US, objecting strenuously to a permanent US military presence in the Muslim holy land.



From 1994 Afghanistan was increasingly dominated by a faction of Mujahideen known as Taliban or seminary students (who were backed by Pakistani military intelligence, which learned the trick from Reagan and which were flush from all those billions the Reagan administration had funneled into the region). In 1996 Bin Laden came back and reestablished himself there, becoming the leader of 5,000 radical Arab volunteers that Reagan had urged Fahd to help come to Afghanistan back in the 1980s.



In the meantime, the US had steadfastly supported Israeli

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encroachments on the Palestinian Occupied Territories and the gradual complete annexation of Jerusalem, the third holiest city to Muslims.



Since the outbreak of the first intifada, Israeli troops had riposted with brutality. Even after the Oslo accords were signed, the size of Israeli colonies in the Palestinian West Bank and around Jerusalem doubled.



A steady drumbeat of violence against Palestinians by Israelis, who were stealing their land and clearly intended to monopolize their sacred space, enraged the Muslim radicals that had been built up and coddled by Reagan.

In 1998, al-Qaeda and al-Jihad al-Islami, two small terrorist groups established in Afghanistan as a result of the Reagan jihad, declared war on the United States and Israel (the "Zionists and Crusaders"). After attacks by al-Qaeda cells on US embassies in East Africa and on the USS Cole, nineteen of them ultimately used jet planes to attack the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

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The Bush administration responded to these attacks by the former proteges of Ronald Reagan by putting the old Mujahideen warlords back in charge of Afghanistan's provinces, allowing Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to escape, declaring that Americans no longer needed a Bill of Rights, and suddenly invading another old Reagan protege, Saddam's Iraq, which had had nothing to do with 9/11 and posed no threat to the US. The name given this bizarre set of actions by Bush was "the War on Terror."

In Iraq, the US committed many atrocities, including bombing campaigns on civilian quarters of cities it had already occupied, and a ferocious assault on Fallujah, and tortured Iraqi prisoners.

In the meantime, the Bush administration put virtually no money or effort into actually combatting terrorist cells in places like Morocco, as opposed to putting \$200 billion into the Iraq war and aftermath. As a result, a string of terrorist attacks were allowed to strike at Madrid, London and elsewhere.

Fred Ikle, who had been part of the Reaganist/Chinese Communist effort to convince Muslim fundamentalist generals in Pakistan-- against their better judgment-- to allow the US to give the radical Muslim extremists even more sophisticated weapons, wrote an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal urging the nuking of Mecca.

**Then in July, 2005, General Richard Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff**, announced that there was not actually any "War on Terror." ' General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the National Press Club on Monday that he had "objected to the use of the term 'war on terrorism' before, because if you call it a war, then you think of people in uniform as being the solution." ' (Question: Does this mean we can have the Bill of Rights back, now?)

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- 01/01/2003 - 02/01/2003
- 02/01/2003 - 03/01/2003
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The American Right, having created the Mujahideen and having mightily contributed to the creation of al-Qaeda, abruptly announced that there was something deeply wrong with Islam, that it kept producing terrorists.

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**Go here for some telling excerpts from Coll's excellent *Ghost Wars*.**

*posted by Juan Cole @ 8/02/2005 05:05:00 PM*

### 15 COMMENTS:

*At 2:14 PM, Monty and Lucy said...*

I think that about sums it up. What I have never understood is the American public's love of Reagan he was a lizard lipped old bastard with the iq of a budgie. The notion that this cretin Won the cold war is laughable. If there is a hell Ronald Reagan is in it. Actually it's probably where he came from.

*At 5:18 PM, dr.know said...*

Ouch! I hate it when our history doesn't line up with neocon ideology!

*At 5:54 PM, Leah said...*

This should be printed up as a pamphlet, complete with the pictures, and handed out at work, at play, at home, to friends and family, at demonstrations, perhaps hand-delivered to your local congress critter, with attribution, of course, and the URL for Dr. Cole's blogs.

Brilliant.

As difficult as getting out of Iraq, undermining this entire War On Terror metaphor is surely as important.

Professor Cole has given us a wonderful tool here.

*At 5:55 PM, Anonymous said...*

Amazing well put Juan. Thanks for connecting the dots in such a way that even a Republican can understand. Plus there are PICTURES!!!! /snark....

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Best Expert Blog  
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*At 6:22 PM, Anonymous said...*

Great History. The only thing I might add is in the role of poppy (heroin) production which was used to fund the Muj and made many warlords extremely wealthy. (CIA of course was involved)

*At 6:27 PM, mr204 said...*

Hmm. No mention of Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the real Mujahid who eventually drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan with U.S. assistance and was assassinated by al-Qaeda for his efforts. No mention of the fact that the Dems in Congress were in bed with Daniel Ortega. The U.S. once supplied John Walker Jr. with a salary, equipment, a FBI pension and classified intel, but he still turned on his own country and sold out to the KGB. No country in the world has escaped betrayal by an ally, which makes your indignation and shock that one-time U.S. allies such as Saddam or Bin Laden would do a 180 seem disingenuous. I would agree however that turning our back on the Mujahidin in Afghanistan and the Shiites in Iraq after the Gulf War was deplorable.

*At 7:50 PM, Capt. Jean-Luc Pikachu said...*

"They even sent around a 'biblical checklist' for grading US congressman as to how close they were to the "Christian" political line."

I realize that I am, as usual, *incredibly* late to the party, but does anyone have a copy of these checklists?

*At 8:05 PM, Anonymous said...*

And to think the Soviets invaded Afghanistan because they were terrified of the budding Islamic extremism there and elsewhere in the region...

*At 8:12 PM, Anonymous said...*

What goes around comes around...

*At 8:46 PM, blennon said...*

I think this was a well written article and conveyed a clear message.

To the author: I would have felt more comfortable reading it if there were some sources cited.



2003  
Koufax Award  
Best Expert Blog  
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*At 9:15 PM, Mike Engelhart said...*

I don't really disagree with the ideas in the piece, but I'd like to see it incorporate the elements of the PLO/jihadis and the Iranian student movement that terrorized the middle east in the 1970s. I know Zawahiri was involved in the Sadat assassination, but can we trace the origins of the current problem a little further back? Or are they separate? I have no idea. Just wondering.

*At 9:53 PM, Anonymous said...*

We have religion versus religion on a worldwide scale. "Christians" want to rule the (religious) world to the exclusion of all else or all others. It's time we took another look at Libertarianism, with a healthy dose of Democracy thrown in, then throw the Repugnians OUT. Conservatism is nothing but the making of, and preservation of, an aristocracy. We should have no part of that. Watch the DVD "With God On Our Side", it talks about the rise of the religious "right" in our country, and how dangerous it is, for all it really espouses and teaches, is hatred.

*At 11:14 PM, swimwatchblog said...*

It saddens me that I didn't know this until today. Keep up the good work :)

*At 11:44 PM, Anonymous said...*

Some historians who have studied this disaster have referred to it as the "Reagan Wreckage."

*At 12:10 AM, littlerobin said...*

Ronald Reagen was a good man, but he was a politician.

Today, we see the far right and the far left aligning behind Ron Paul in an effort to remove these kinds of interventionist games that our politicians play with other countries.

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