

CIA and KGB Covert Operations in Iran and Afghanistan and how it affects the US in the war on Terror with an emphasis on Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore what happened to the world in relation to terrorism after the fall of the USSR and examine if CIA and KGB operations contributed to terrorism. When the world was in a bipolar state and lost a superpower, the void would normally be replaced by another state or the world would turn multipolar. Rarely has the world been unipolar and that was only achieved by military campaigns aimed at conquering the world. Though the US did not conquer the world like the Romans, the US did use its covert operatives in a secret war against the USSR and their operatives. The world was transformed into a secret battlefield and the normal turmoil that would ensue from regime changes in the Middle-East was forever altered by clandestine operations. Secret wars gave birth to secret insurgencies and secret counterinsurgencies. When the Soviets fell, something had to replace them. This paper highlights one country dominated by the KGB, another by the CIA, and a third less tarnished, in hopes of examining the secret void from secret wars that may have given rise to terrorism. The US may not have to worry about terrorists if it did not engage the KGB and acted the way it did in the Middle East.

Introduction

In a bipolar world, things were less complicated. There were clear enemies: capitalistic pigs, and commie-red ants. The nations of the world aligned themselves to the red banners of Moscow or to the Stars and Stripes of the U.S. So why did everything get so shaken up in the world after the fall of communism? Why couldn't the world stay relatively stable under one super power? Why is the world populated with terrorists the way it is? Perhaps the answers can be traced back to intelligence gathering and covert operations during the Cold War. The activities conducted by the CIA and KGB of the past have shaped the world of terror. It is rational to believe that a country will not want to be influenced from the outside, and the more it is influenced from the outside, the more outraged a portion of its people will become, forcing them to retaliate. Perhaps terrorists now felt terrorized themselves with the US and USSR operating in their countries, as such, they would operate in the home lands of their terrorists.

Iran

After 1945, Iran became an exporter of oil and the ruling Pahlavi dynasty was able to ally with Western powers and grow the Iranian military. This put Iran in the position to craft policy for the region and the world. The Iranian economic base was oil; oil gained more precedent in the country, guiding its foreign policy decisions (Ehteshami, 2002).

In the past (pre-WWII), Iran used to be a weak regional actor, but under the Pahlavi regime, the state became strong enough to determine policy in the region. However, the kingdom was still heavily influenced by the West, especially in terms of oil. After the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism and the Iranian revolution, the country became committed to anti-Western doctrine in foreign policy. According to regional experts: “historically, fears and perceptions of foreign interference have formed the basis of Iranian nationalism” (Ehteshami, 2002, p. 284).

After the revolution and subsequent rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini, a new Iranian government was established. The central thought was simple: the government, led by Khomeini, would: spread Islam to all nations on the globe, creating an Islamic world order. This world order was to be led by a grand Islamic ruler. Until this grand ruler is found (they are still looking), the supreme radical Islamic religious leaders of their respective countries were to rule, with unquestioned authority. This may sound irrational with the US as a superpower (and at the time, the Soviets as the rivaling force), but they are not Islamic governments, and are therefore illegitimate in the eyes of the Ayatollah, thus the West and the Soviets were irrelevant. This allowed Iranians to feel that they were important regional and global actors and it perpetuated the enthusiasm of radical Islam; to them, the West was suddenly unimportant. (Cole, 1986). Iranian perceptions of the world did not keep the KGB and the CIA from conducting covert missions in-country. The KGB not only conducted missions against the CIA and British Intelligence, but also aimed to undermine the Islamic rule in Iran in the hopes of securing the oil fields for the Soviets. The Soviets felt there were commonalities which would aid in their subversion of Iran. In their mind, the 1917 Red Revolution and the 1979 Islamic Revolution were related: a single elitist government was entirely replaced with a more consolidated one. Both regimes succeeded in redistributing power. The Bolsheviks and the Islamists wanted to erode the upper classes and establish a government based on what they felt was good for the people. The Soviets erected communism and the Islamic Revolutionaries constructed the Islamic State. The Soviets and Iranians wanted their doctrines spread around the world in mass uprisings creating a utopian world with no problems (Cole, 1986).

To create the Communist workers’ utopia, Soviets would carry out missions in Iran to undermine the government, long before the 1979 Revolution. The primary goal of subversion in Iran was not control of the country, but to defeat the West. The KGB broke into many of the embassies in the region including those in Iran. Iran was considered a friendly nation (before 1979), and as such, the KGB could get away with more than the US. Ironically for the Iranians, the Soviets had been intercepting Iranian secret communications between their leaders to foreign countries and within the ranks of the Iranian military as far back as the 1920s. Later on the Soviets became suspects in an assassination attempt on the Shah of Iran in 1949. By 1953, the US had renewed its interests in developing relations with Iran. Until then, the US was viewed as an uninterested party in Iranian nationalist movements. However, anti-Western doctrine had already been adopted. The US wanted to stop the Soviet threat, but the KGB beat them to winning over the Iranians (Ro’I, 1984).

In the 1970s, the Soviets established themselves in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. The Shah of Iran was also beginning to feel internal pressure, from what he thought were covert KGB political operations. The Iranian press then published a story about the KGB threat to Iran. The KGB blamed the political unrest on the US and claimed they were trying to gain access to Iranian oil. In 1978, the Shah was

directly targeted by the Soviet government through diplomatic channels. The Soviets may or may not have started the Iranian revolution, but either way, it happened (Andrew, 1990).

After the 1979 Revolution, the Iranian people remained unified behind the government. So in subverting Iran, the Soviets had to counteract radical Islam. Soviet strategists theorized that Iran as a communist foothold would allow covert operations to subvert other countries, spreading communism around the region. Once the outlying countries were under control, the Soviets planned to engulf the Middle East, securing the oil fields and salt-water ports. Soviet analysis of Iranian politics determined their politicians use mass-mobilization politics in elections and setting policy in the country. The Soviets took advantage of the mass-mobilization politics and developed a provisional government in Azerbaijan in hopes to get access to Iranian oil. This KGB operation gave birth to the Tudeh Communist Party, the goal of which was to erect a communist government in Iran and develop anti-revolutionary policies that would allow a Soviet takeover of the state. (Andrew, 1990)

The CIA countered the KGB by conducting its own operations in Iran. It was not long before they confronted the KGB and their Soviet goals. After the Iranian hostage crisis, “American policymakers decided very early on to throw in their lot with the Ayatollah Khomeini, expecting that Muslim fundamentalism would be the best defense against communism in the Middle East” (Prados, 2006, p. 499). To gain intelligence, the CIA supported Iranian exiles and paid for arms that the Israelis would supply to the new government. This created two separate sources of intelligence. Additionally, the CIA used radio and TV to broadcast anti-revolutionary propaganda for the exiled Iranian leadership while turning over information gathered by Soviet defectors to the Khomeini security services. The CIA was generating upheaval in the country and simultaneously helping the Revolutionary Government by supplying them with intelligence. This included the Soviet Tudeh Communist Party (Prados, 2006). The increase in information flows led to the outlawing of political parties in Iran and the execution of the Communist Party members. In an attempt to gain even more favor, the CIA gave up the names of the defectors who were working with the CIA and attempting to subvert the Ayatollah and reestablish the old dynasty. However, this backfired. The CIA could not stop Iranian backing of terrorism in the Middle East. This included terrorists in Lebanon, who blew up the American barracks, attacked the US Embassy, and captured CIA operatives (Prados, 2006).

The CIA attempted to re-build its networks in Iran. They decided to give the Iranians more arms shipments in hopes of getting back the captured operatives. This mission was hidden from the US Congress and carried out by private citizens authorized by the President. The Iranians did not give back the hostages. It was not until another deal was made that some hostages were released. It was leaked to the press and the Regan Administration got in major political trouble. The Iranian-backed terrorists in Lebanon captured more Westerners. This is where Oliver North leaked intelligence to the Iranians in hopes that they would cooperate. But they did not, the US stopped talks, and the CIA established more covert operations in Iran. Right now, these links remain classified and are thought to be for gathering intelligence and/or to subvert the government. (Prados, 2006).

With all the covert activity in Iran, the government is paranoid and wants to keep its interests safe from outside influence. As such, “factionalism and institutional competition was, from the beginning, an important feature of the post revolution Iranian political system. The factions themselves are rather fluid, and as they are normally comprised of a variety of tendencies and blocs build around powerful personalities, they tend to act as fronts and as such do not always function as a single entity” (Ehteshami, 2002, p. 292). Under the Ayatollah, a National Security Council was formed under direct control of the President of Iran. Decision making was centralized under the executive branch of the government to keep political subversion at a low. Iran’s history has made the people feel that they were weak for so long, and

now they are strong and must maintain their strength. Iran is one of the bigger actors in the region, but they still must adapt to policy set by other states. The Iranians are working to be the regional policy setter; understanding this is key in analyzing Iranian policy (Ehteshami, 2002).

Iranians as a whole dislike the radical Islamic factions in the region; however, they remain conservative Muslims. The current Iranian government wants to preserve their Islamic society and stays removed from the West. The Ayatollah is concerned that Iran will become corrupted due to cultural exchanges facilitated by foreign investment damaging the Islamic beliefs of the country. Not only will this affect the faith, it would also damage the credibility of Iran as an Islamic policy setter. As such, great care is given to insulate the policy making process from foreigners (Ehteshami, 2002).

Afghanistan

Before the big Soviet Invasion/Occupation of Afghanistan, a US Ambassador, Adolph Dubs, was kidnapped for suspected CIA ties. This was at a time when the Soviets had indirect control of the country and were dealing with upheaval. Dubs was held in a hotel room in Kabul. His capturers demanded the release of prisoners held by the Afghans; “rather than negotiate, the Afghans launched an assault on the hotel room where Dubs was held. Their people went in with Russian equipment” (Prados, 2006, p. 468). Although it was made to look like an Afghan operation, it was supervised by Soviet brass and in the end, Dubs was killed (Prados, 2006). The surviving capturers were executed, the crime scene was blocked from American investigation, evidence was planted, and it is still unknown if it was a Russian or Afghan conspiracy, or if there even was a conspiracy. The US wanted payback (Prados, 2006).

The CIA source of Afghani information in the 1970s is the same as it is today, namely centered on operations with/through the Pakistani intelligence network. This connection was actually made by the US DEA, who had been tracing drug shipments from Afghan resistance fighters. They traced the drug routes through Pakistan and were using the Pakistanis to stop drug trafficking. Eventually the CIA took over the links and used them to train the Mujahidin; the CIA-backed resistance movement. This forced the Soviets to escalate their involvement in Afghanistan to quell the uprising. Still, the Mujahidin persisted and with CIA training the rebellion got stronger. By then, the Saudi’s were also matching CIA monetary backing, which paid for a global propaganda campaign against the new Afghan government and the Soviets. This hidden aid was too much, the Soviets had to fully commit, and they went in to the country a week after the propaganda campaign started (Prados, 2006).

The CIA had gathered such a large amount of intelligence on the Soviet invasion that it gave a ten-day advanced-notice to US officials, prior to invasion. The reports included “Russian buildup prior to invasion, their increased state of Alert, Russian Spetnaz (commandos) into Kabul... and even the ethnic composition of the Russian forces.”(Prados, 2006, p. 472). The implications of this kind of intelligence is enormous. In any engagement, information is power, this is only magnified in a covert war, where the combatants need the freshest intelligence to win. The CIA was able to gather an overwhelming amount of information to be used if needed in fighting the Soviets via the Taliban. This meant that, if anything was needed to be analyzed, the CIA probably had a file on it already, which saved time, money and effort. The US lured the soviets right into a trap (Prados, 2006).

However, the Soviets had plenty of practice. “As heirs of the Russian empire they had the benefit of two centuries of experience in guerrilla warfare in a Muslim milieu during which they learned how to crush revolts and to cope with political agitation.” (Ro’I, 1984, p. 206). In fact, the Soviets had established a standard operating procedure for uprisings. Their tactics included inciting old rivalries, bribing the elite class into the Communist Party, using religious leaders to persuade followers to communism, and use of

terror tactics as coercion. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the US countered with extremely accurate intelligence and stopped the Soviets at crucial junctures (Ro'I, 1984).

In the latter part of the occupation, the Soviets assassinated the Afghan head of government for fear that he would give into rising Islamic Radicalism from Iran or that he would be overthrown by Islamists like that of the Shah in Iran. At any rate, the KGB decided he needed to go. They stormed the Presidential Palace with a full armored column. Upon assassination of the Afghan President, the Soviets broadcasted that there was an execution and then election of a new leader. This new president also happened to be an Afghan KGB agent. This attempt to regain control of the country was too late. The CIA had increased their backing of the Mujahidin, there was unrest in other parts of the Soviet Union, the Afghan economy was crashing, and the war was getting expensive. As a result, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 (Prados, 2006).

In the War on Terror in Afghanistan, the US used the last CIA Afghan station chief to lead the way in the hunt for Osama bin-Laden after 9/11. He used his old ties and reestablished covert networks in-country, led two separate teams of operatives, and directed Special Forces to work in concert with the Northern Alliance. Oddly enough, the Northern Alliance had been militarily and financially backed since the '90s by the Iranians (Auburn Associates, 2007), similarly, the Taliban and Osama bin Laden was backed by the CIA in the Soviet invasion period. The US worked with the Iranians. It was the Iranians that convinced the Northern Alliance to work with the US, provided intelligence, allowed use of Iranian territory/airspace, and helped establish the post-Taliban government. Iran wanted better relations with the West (Auburn Associates, 2007).

However, Iran was also shipping explosives and weapons to the Palestinians. "Having declared a global war on terror after the September 11 attacks, the Bush Administration harshly denounced Iran...President Bush portrayed Iran as part of an axis of evil" (The Middle East, 2007, 256-257). This statement and others like it were bad for diplomacy between Iran and the US. The Bush administration did not side with the Iranians. Instead, the US shunned them and lowered their approval of the West, now the Iranians are suspected of supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq. The Bush administration stance may have been too harsh. It should have been adopted to allow for continued Iranian support. The US needed to provide incentives to Iran to stop funding Palestinian insurgency in Israel.

Saudi Arabia

So if the US cannot count on Iran, because it supports terrorist organizations, including those who work against the US and its allies in the region, the US can still rely on Saudi Arabia, right? "Although the partnership is often characterized as solely on oil for security, the actual relationship is much more complex. The relationship is deeply based on personal connections between people of each country. These connections are strengthened by shared strategic interests in geopolitical issues concerning the Middle East and the world." (Al-Faisal, 2006, p.14).

From the start, the Soviets and Saudis had conflict. The Saudis viewed themselves as guardians of Islam, protectors of the Kingdom's economic and political interests, and as the ones who can affect change in the region. The USSR, on the other hand, believed that Communist ideology reigned supreme and would dominate all other political dogma, that the socialist economic system was the strongest in the world, and that the USSR could force change in the region. The Soviets were considered by the Saudis to be expansionary, resource hungry, immoral, against peace, and wanting to incite rebellion. The Saudis were also concerned that the Soviets would try and take their oil fields. As such, Saudi Arabia sided with the US. (Ro'I, 1984).

During the Cold War, the KGB recruited Saudi students in Britain, to act as spies who would hand over British secrets to the Saudi government. However, these operatives did not realize the information was also seen by Soviet officials and used to make strategic decisions. The KGB also took full advantage of the Middle-Eastern desired pan-Arabia visions. This unified all the countries with a radical Islamic movement and they had a shared goal with the Soviets: eradication of Western influence in the gulf. This put Saudi Arabia under intense diplomatic pressure, and even some internal pressure to join the pan-Arab league (Andrew, 1990).

The Saudis have always acted in the best interest of their country. It is the opinion of Prince Al-Faisal, that the US and Saudis interact well because of shared principals, values, and friendships (Al-Faisal, 2006). This is what facilitates cooperation to fight Soviet and Iraqi aggression and may lead to the defeat of terrorists around the world. Although, it helps there is a shared interest in stopping acts of terrorism carried out on Saudis and US citizens alike. The Saudis feel that relations with the US were only strained due to the myths created by the mass-media in the wake of 9/11. In fact, the Saudis' report that: "Al-Qaeda continues to oppose the Saudi government because it is trying to modernize and become a more integral part of the world community and economy" (Al-Faisal, 2006, p. 16). This means that Saudi Arabia is targeted by terrorists because the Saudis are become more Westernized.

On the other end of the spectrum, Saudi officials have overlooked money transfers to support extremism. When asked about it, the Saudi ambassador to the US said that Saudi money is easily traced in Europe but lost in the US (Levitt, 2002, p. 82-83). To improve Saudi-US relations, the kingdom has mandated that all charity contributions go to organizations managed by a member of the royal family (Levitt, 2002). Unfortunately, some of these organizations have funded terrorism in the past and are most likely continuing such funding at the current time as well. "The Saudi government has been strongly criticized for setting too narrow an agenda and too slow a pace for change." (Zuhur, 2005, p. V). Prior to Gulf War I, "Approval of an Islamically-defined resistance was stronger in Saudi Arabia than in some other quarters of the Middle East." (Zuhur, 2005, p. 23). Upon joining the coalition, the Saudis dealt with mass Islamic protests that were aimed at undermining the coalition, to voice fear of imperialism, and to recruit more radicals. However, most Saudis do not want an Islamic radicalist government.

Now it appears the Saudis have ended up in a really bad situation. They can either leave the US leaving The Kingdom in a security dilemma; there would be no support from the US to stop terrorists from terrorizing, or they can ally with the US and keep secure from Soviet, Iraqi, and other terrorist plots. If the Saudis lost the US as an ally, they could become victims of more terrorist attacks. One must understand that Saudi Arabia also has terrorists looking to undermine the Royal Family for reasons ranging from human rights abuses to establishing their own view of Islam. With all this in mind, the Saudis remain allied with the US for over 60 years. US-Saudi ties go back to the 1920s and 1930s when oil was discovered in the desert. Ever since then, the Saudis and the US have been economic partners, military assistants, and friends with each other (Al-Faisal, 2006).

The Saudis depend on the West. Their people were alienated when the US media painted them as evil and encouraging terrorists. It is not the Royal Family that wants to undermine the West, that would not make sense. The Royals would be attacking an economic partnership that brings wealth to the country. Instead, it is people inside the country that are trying to undermine confidence in dealings with the US. As such, the Saudis maintain a balance between security/intelligence aid to the US and managing internal conflict in their country.

Linking it all into Terrorism

Saudi suspects in the war on terror are increasing in number, not only as terrorist, but also as financiers. They work similar to how the CIA funded Osama bin-Laden in his fight against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, only these financiers are against the U.S. Some of their money suppliers are men like Yasin al Qadi. In 1992 Qadi gave nearly \$1 million to Hamas, based in America, through false charity organizations (Levitt, 2002, p. 81, 82). He is also the CEO of a front organization, the Muwafaq Foundation, which elite wealthy Saudi's use to fund al-Qaeda operations millions of dollars. Qadi's foundation was endowed by a former chief of the National Commercial Bank of Saudi Arabia, Khalid bin Mahfouz, who was a high-ranking leader in a London-based front organization for funding terrorist operations in Europe. Other individual Saudis have been linked to direct gathering and distribution of funds to the 9/11 hijackers. It can be assumed that there are other individuals, like these, with connections in Saudi elite/affluent circles who use their position and wealth to spread their own beliefs (Levitt, 2002).

In terms of Iran in the 1980s, Ayatollah Khomeini developed foreign policy that: "various factions and centers of power within the clerical establishment took advantage of many opportunities to advance their own interests and to implement their own foreign agendas" (Ehteshami, 2002, p. 291). This aided in the spread of radical Islam in the region with the goal to form alliances between Arab states, independent organizations, and Iran. Iran has been linked to al-Qaeda as early as 1995. In 1995 and 1996 al-Qaeda operatives, under orders from bin Laden, worked to ally the terrorist organization with Iranian military intelligence to attack the US. Before the 1998 Kenya and Tanzania US Embassy bombings Osama's satellite phone is reported to have made 10% of his calls to Iran (Levitt, 2002, p. 63).

Even though the Iranians wanted to be removed from the world and then dominate it through Islam, the Afghans did not. With regard to terrorism: "The KGB was not the godfather of Middle Eastern terrorism, neither was it an innocent. Though it disapproved of attacks on civilian targets, the Center was well aware that some of the freedom fighters were actual or potential terrorists" (Andrew, 1990, p. 546). During the 70s the Soviet Union gave indirect aid to Middle-Eastern terrorist organizations, via consulates of foreign countries in the USSR, in the form of training and funding. The US did the same to undermine Soviet expansion in Afghanistan (Andrew, 1990). The US ended up giving munitions to its future enemies. However, these enemies only came about because of Gulf War I and the coalition allowing infidels to step on Muslim ground.

How does Afghanistan fit in with Iran: "Iran's longstanding links to al-Qaeda; in fact, Tehran may be closer to Osama bin Laden's organization than ever before...a number of captured al-Qaeda operatives said the Iranians told them before their departure that they may be called on at some point to assist Iran" (Levitt, 2002, p. 62-63). With regard to Saudi Arabia, "one U.S. official was quoted as saying that[humanitarian] groups do a small amount of legitimate humanitarian work and raise a lot of money for equipment and weapons" (Levitt, 2002, p. 79). As for Afghanistan, the US is using the same tactics it did to undermine the Soviets to undermine the Taliban. The problem is the Taliban was trained too well and now the terrorists are probably getting funding from another source too. The US is not realizing it, just as the Soviets did not realize the CIA assistance to the resistance movement.

The Ayatollah felt that the superpowers didn't matter, because they weren't Islamic. However, to the intelligence community in the US and USSR, the Iranians did matter, although for a different reason. The superpowers waged a war of covert missions against each other in Iran and Afghanistan using regional clashes as a diversion tactic for CIA and KGB operations. This certainly influenced Iranian foreign policy, setting a precedent that outside countries now have to deal with Iranian paranoia of non-Islamic outside actors. Introduce Israel and the whole thing gets more complicated. Israel sided with the West;

therefore, Iran sided with the Soviets, because they would not want to ally with a nation allied to Israel. The states under British control, around the time of WWII, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE attempted to remain natural. In the bipolar world, they were in fear of Soviet power plays and sided with the West. The remaining states, worried about security, eventually sided with the US or the Soviets, to remain protected from possible invasions. These Western-friendly countries grew nervous of Soviet power plays in the region. As such they aligned closer with the US for security.

However, with the fall of the USSR, the world changed. Oddly enough, there remains a correlation of terrorist home states being the majority of states that allied with the Soviets. The Western security umbrella now became an infestation in the eyes of radical Islamists, who were already ridding their region of the world of the Soviet infidels. The Westerns stayed to keep oil and commerce secure. The regional policy setter states allowed it, and thus the new satin was found in the Saudi Royal family and in the US. The Bush Administration wanted to shake up everything with shock and awe as a preemptive measure to terrorists in Iraq and the world (Gaddis, 2005). The problem is, that terrorists do not need a nation-state to conduct business. The war in Iraq used as an act of deterrence involves a large military invasion, oddly enough, the Soviet solution to Afghanistan. Perhaps the secret warriors of the CIA combat an adversary that lured the US into a trap like the Soviets in the 1970s. Gaddis argues that the military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan may also be there for high-level politics, in that, Bush was signaling, if a country harbors terrorists and cannot control them, the US may intervene.

Conclusion

In a full-scale war, the entirety of the national population knows about the war. The state typically fights their adversary with the entirety of the population. In secret wars, a much smaller portion of the population is aware of the battles. As such, a smaller group of people are directly affected. If this secret war is then transported into another nation/group of nations, then even less of the population knows about it, except for a small portion of the indigenous population of these host countries. Chances are, the locals do not like a covert war in their country and it may lead to retaliation by the host country or a group of terrorists. This could explain the provocation for how terrorism is shaped in the world today in relation to the US. The CIA and the KGB had conflicts in many host countries in many regions, almost like separate campaigns in a global spy war. The CIA and KGB operations in Iran made the Iranians paranoid. The operations conducted in Afghanistan against the Soviets gave way to more operations against a Soviet foe that the US created, that the US now fights. The Saudis have to deal with remaining loyal to the US; as such they are victimized by terrorists who want the US out of the region. One could argue that this Mid-East construct would have never happened if the region never harbored a secret war. If the US left the region when the USSR fell apart, one could argue that resistance movements would have disbanded and the world would be a much different place.

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