

## TERRORISM

## The Next Intelligence Crisis

by Philip Jenkins

In the months since the attacks of September 11, 2001, we have heard a great deal about the need to repair the intelligence walls that should have been defending America. There is no question that the United States needs a much stronger and more proactive intelligence apparatus, both foreign and domestic, and I, for one, am not too troubled by the prospect of American agents bugging, burgling, and even killing our enemies, should those acts be necessary to save the lives of our own people. It has been fascinating over recent months to read media accounts of liberal and leftist young people, inflamed by the new patriotism, announce that they are seriously considering careers in intelligence.

Yet even as we pour new resources into the CIA, FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security and enhance their powers, it would be a good idea to pay a little attention to history and to recall just how we got ourselves into this fix in the first place. Briefly, in the 1940's and 50's, federal agencies acquired vast powers, at a time when it seemed unpatriotic to inquire exactly how they were using them. When it was revealed that these agencies were engaging in many questionable activities—some of them criminal—public opinion turned decisively against them, resulting in the crippling of U.S. intelligence in the 80's and 90's. As we enter a new phase of seemingly uncritical support for intelligence, we should be thinking hard about how to avoid the next phase in the cycle. Otherwise, in another five or ten years, we will once again face a series of exposés and public hearings that will ruin our intelligence forces and, who knows, perhaps even bring down a future U.S. administration.

We do not have to believe in inevitable historical cycles to accept this warning: We need only observe the well-established fact that, in certain circum-

stances, bureaucratic agencies tend to behave in similar ways. If the political environment of the coming decade is going to look increasingly like that of the 50's and 60's, then it is not unreasonable to assume that agencies will respond in much the same ways as they did in years past. We really have been here before.

Based on the horrors of earlier years, I would suggest a number of ground rules that should be drummed into the senior officials of the intelligence agencies, then incorporated into the training of all personnel. Better they should learn them now than through bitter experience. I also want to suggest how readily this kind of information can be found, in widely available books: We are not dealing here with arcane state secrets.

First, we must accept the profound moral ambiguities of the intelligence world or, to put it more coarsely, acknowledge that when you lie down with dogs, you will wake up with fleas. As a group or individual enters more deeply into the fight against terrorism, this means associating with very bad people, who are involved in seriously criminal conduct, including murder, violence and drug-dealing. Drugs are likely to remain central in such underground activity, because the drug trade is and always has been so intimately connected with other forms of illegal international commerce that lead into terrorist networks, notably the traffic in weapons and gold. Underworlds intersect. If you want to track Islamist networks in Europe today, you have to follow the heroin, and you can scarcely do that unless, at some stage, you actively deal in that drug, or else protect somebody else trafficking in it. And anyone wanting to influence affairs in Pakistan and Afghanistan had better have firsthand acquaintance with the world of opium.

Intelligence agents must always be aware of who is using whom. At some stage, you will probably have to assist X in escaping the legal consequences of some crime—a regrettable necessity. But things become very dangerous when you find that you are giving an informant a free pass on criminal activity, and even profiting from it. To see how plans go terribly wrong when dealing with informants, read *Black Mass*, the horrifying book by Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill

(Harper Perennial) on how the FBI became, over three decades, the chief protectors and patrons of Boston's lethal Irish crime syndicate. And to see how tolerating crime can slide into full participation in those activities, read Alfred W. McCoy's wonderful book on CIA drug-dealing during the Vietnam era, *The Politics of Heroin in South-East Asia* (Lawrence Hill & Co.). Nor are these misdeeds the sole preserve of U.S. intelligence agencies. Chris Moore's *The Kincora Scandal* (Dufour Editions) tells the horrific story of how an attempt to blackmail Ulster paramilitaries in the 1970's led British intelligence to turn a blind eye to the sexual abuse of hundreds of young boys.

Dealing with bad people often means doing things that seem very shady—for instance, giving weapons to people you believe to be terrorists. Usually, this is done with some higher purpose in mind, such as gaining entrée to a terrorist operation in order to prevent a worse crime. At such times, only a fool would complain about violations of strict legality: Some laws have to be broken. However, anyone involved in intelligence needs to be alert to the dangers involved in moonlighting or subcontracting. The prospective agent must always bear in the back of his mind the story of Edwin Wilson, Frank Terpil, and the “syndicate within a syndicate” that operated in the CIA in the 1970's.

The exact story remains controversial, but briefly, Wilson was a senior CIA agent who began subcontracting for various states and terrorist organizations. Among other things, the Wilson syndicate succeeded in diverting large quantities of U.S. arms to Libya, training Middle Eastern terrorists, and undertaking the assassination of Libya's enemies overseas. U.S. intelligence agents who came into contact with Wilson knew that he was no longer officially with the CIA, but that fact meant nothing, since nobody ever really leaves the CIA, or the FBI, or any of their counterparts. They assumed that he was still working for the CIA, but his operations were so flagrantly dangerous that they repeatedly checked with Agency higher-ups in Washington, only to be assured that his actions were known and approved. This raises the possibility that a substantial number of highly placed CIA officers were involved in Wil-

son's moonlighting. The "Halloween Massacre," the purge of these dubious characters in 1977, threw the agency's overseas operations into chaos, especially in the Middle East—though it is difficult to see how else the Agency's political masters could have reacted to such widespread criminality. The Wilson disaster has been chronicled in Peter Maas's *Manhunt* (Harrap Publishing Group), and Joseph C. Goulden's *The Death Merchant* (Simon & Schuster).

Intelligence agencies demand extraordinary powers on the grounds that the nation is facing extraordinary dangers, and that claim is often justified. As time goes by, though, that justification is stretched to permit activities not obviously connected with the original threat. This danger became evident in the Nixon years as the administration increasingly tried to use intelligence agencies against its internal political foes. At first, this policy had some possible justification—perhaps foreign powers really could have been aiding internal dissidents such as the Black Panthers and Weathermen—but as time passed, the CIA, the FBI, and other agencies made it clear that such foreign dabbling was of marginal significance. That left the White House to form its own "plumbing" force to control leaks and harass enemies, and the obvious source for such technicians was the intelligence or "ex-intelligence" community. Sooner or later, though, those operations would be discovered and would track back both to the White House and to the agencies themselves. Once the intelligence agencies were associated irrevocably with one party and one administration, their very existence was imperiled, and the stage was set for the exposés of the mid-1970's—the Church and Rockefeller committees. Any future intelligence chief needs to know the story of Watergate in great detail and to have on his wall a large plaque that reads "Never again!"

Just as essential as rules against moonlighting and plumbing is the injunction never to wander "off the shelf," to operate outside official direction. Hard though it may be to believe, Congress really does have some say over the funding of intelligence and international politics, and it is a dangerous idea to try to get around these controls by private fundraising. The problem is that the resources for carrying out a private foreign policy abound, in the form of funds from friendly governments or magnates or the profits of illicit enterprise. When a faction of an in-

telligence agency decides to go off on its own, as Wilson did, it has the potential to provide a complete off-the-shelf quasi-governmental agency, operating entirely in the shadows, free from government restraint. We saw such a quasi-government in operation in Central America in the 1980's, when the Reagan administration fought its clandestine war against communism through a bunch of really questionable CIA types, mercenaries, and "consultants." As a semiprivate operation, they could act without the stern restrictions that Congress had placed on funding anticommunist activism. So what could go wrong?

The answer, of course, is that, at some point, such demi-/semi-/quasi-approved operations are linked to the White House, and when they come to public attention, the presidency stands the risk of a massive scandal. Semiprivate swash-buckling sounds wonderful, but at some point, it will almost certainly come to ruin, and the consequence will be a public outcry for more effective restrictions on U.S. intelligence operations. To see how this process works in practice, read *Blond Ghost* (Simon & Schuster), David Corn's biography of legendary agent Ted Shackley, who was at the center of every CIA horror story for half a century, or Lawrence Walsh's account of the Iran-Contra affair in *Firewall* (W.W. Norton & Co.).

When things start to go wrong, when the first leaks and exposés start appearing, it is tempting to believe that you will be saved by the public concern for secrecy, that people will be sufficiently terrified by invoking the national enemy of the day, whether communism or terrorism. Unfortunately for any misbehaving agent, such fears do not retain their force indefinitely, and the media are all too likely to turn on you. Also, barring a fundamental change in human nature within the next few years, it is safe to assume that rival intelligence agencies will be the first to help in your exposure and ruin, partly as a weapon in bureaucratic infighting, partly out of personal malice. In short, secrecy will not save you.

Once the scandal does start—and it will—the only question is how high it will go, and the precedent of modern history suggests that intelligence scandals tend to go very high indeed. One President in the 1970's was destroyed by such a crisis, and another in the 1980's came close to sharing his fate. Losing presidents is bad enough, but worse still is the

impact of such a scandal on the nation's defenses. Scandals produce hypercriticism, which cripples agencies and exposes the country to international attack. Let's not permit this cycle to begin again.

*Philip Jenkins is the author, most recently, of The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (Oxford University Press).*

## CULTURE WARS

### Revamped by the Psychic Vampires

by Marian Kester Coombs

When you've done something pretty bad, or nothing particularly good, the best defense is a good offense. Attack mode works better than the smoothest excuses—God forbid you should ever apologize!—to obscure your faults and silence criticism before it is even uttered. Thus we find that the loudest complainers in our midst are those who caused most of the problems in the first place and contribute the least to their solution.

For instance: Between 300 and 400 years ago, your ancestors were brought to the Americas as slaves. There, your numbers increased exponentially until you outnumbered the master class in many regions.

About 200 years ago, the British applied diplomatic pressure, raided ports, boarded ships on the high seas, engaged in skirmishes, and finally put an end to the slave trade worldwide.

Then, 150 years ago, you were emancipated in the United States by means of a gruesome war that killed nearly 700,000 American men, mostly young and almost all white. The Battle of Gettysburg alone slaughtered 51,112 in a mere three days.

Your emancipation preceded the emancipation of Russia's (white) serfs by several years.

Today, there is not a single country in your ancestral homeland where you would enjoy the rights, the opportunities, the education, the prosperity, the freedom, the fame, and the sheer fabulous fun that are yours in the modern United States of America. In addition to enjoying the rights of all Americans, years of