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## Terrorists or “Freedom Fighters”? Recruited by the CIA

By Professor John Ryan  
12/20/2015

*The barbarous phenomenon we recently witnessed in France has roots that go back to at least 1979 when the mujahedeen made their appearance in Afghanistan. At that time their ire was directed at the leftist Taraki government that had come into power in April of 1978. This government’s ascension to power was a sudden and totally indigenous happening – with equal surprise to both the USA and the USSR.*

In April of 1978 the Afghan army deposed the country’s government because of its oppressive measures, and then created a new government, headed by a leftist, Nur Mohammad Taraki, who had been a writer, poet and professor of journalism at the University of Kabul. Following this, for a brief period of time, Afghanistan had a progressive secular government, with broad popular support. As I pointed out in an earlier publication, this government “. . . enacted progressive reforms and gave equal rights to women. It was in the process of dragging the country into the 20th century, and as British political scientist Fred Halliday stated in May 1979 (1), ‘probably more has changed in the countryside over the last year than in two centuries since the state was established.’”

The Taraki government’s first course of action was to declare non-alignment in foreign affairs and to affirm a commitment to Islam within a secular state. Among the much needed reforms, women were given equal rights, and girls were to go to school and be in the same classroom as

boys. Child marriages and feudal dowry payments were banned. Labour unions were legalized, and some 10,000 people were released from prisons. Within a short time hundreds of schools and medical clinics were built in the countryside.

The landholding system hadn't changed much since the feudal period; more than three-quarters of the land was owned by landlords who composed only 3 percent of the rural population. Reforms began on September 1, 1978 by the abolition all debts owed by farmers – landlords and moneylenders had charged up to 45 percent interest. A program was being developed for major land reform, and it was expected that all farm families (including landlords) would be given the equivalent of equal amounts of land. (2)

What happened to this progressive government? In brief, it was undermined by the CIA and the mujahedeen, which triggered a series of events that destroyed the country – and ironically led to the disaster of September 11, 2001 in the USA and to the present chaos and tragedy in Afghanistan. Even before the CIA got involved, as would be expected, the rich landlords and mullahs objected to not only land reform but to all the reforms. Most of the 250,000 mullahs were rich landlords who in their sermons told people that only Allah could give them land, and that Allah would object to giving women equal rights or having girls go to school. But the reforms were popular, so these reactionary elements left for Pakistan, as “refugees.” With assistance from Pakistan, they proceeded to conduct raids on the Afghan countryside where they burned clinics and schools, and if they found teachers teaching girls, they would kill the teachers, often disembowelling them in the presence of the children – to instill fear and panic in the population. Although having no right to interfere in another country's affairs, the USA viewed the new government as being Marxist and was determined to subvert it. At first unofficially, but officially after July 3, 1979 with President Carter's authorization, the CIA, along with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, began to provide military aid and training to the Muslim extremists, who became known as the mujahedeen and “freedom fighters.”

In addition, the CIA recruited Hafizullah Amin, an Afghan Ph.D. student in the USA, and got him to act as a hard-line Marxist. He successfully worked his way up in the Afghan government and in September of 1979 he carried out a coup, and had Taraki killed. With Amin in charge, he jailed thousands of people and undermined the army and discredited the government. To ward off the thousands of well-armed mujahedeen invaders, many being foreign mercenaries, Amin was forced by his government to invite some Soviet troops.(3) Shortly afterwards, Amin was killed and was replaced as president by Babrak Karmal, a former member of the Taraki government who had been in exile in Czechoslovakia. Although still clouded by cold war politics and uncertain history, Karmal “invited” the USSR to send in thousands of troops to deal with the mujahedeen forces. What's not widely known is that the USA through the CIA had been actively involved in Afghan affairs for at least a year, and it was in response to this that the Soviets arrived on the scene.

As I stated some years ago: “The advent of Soviet troops on Afghan soil tragically set the stage for the eventual destruction of the country. Zbigniew Brzezinski, president Carter's National

Security Advisor, afterwards bragged that he had convinced Carter to authorize the CIA to set a trap for the Russian bear and to give the USSR the taste of a Vietnam war.(4) Brzezinski saw this as a golden opportunity to fire up the zeal of the most reactionary Muslim fanatics — to have them declare a jihad (holy war) on the atheist infidels who defiled Afghan soil — and to not only expel them but to pursue them and “liberate” the Muslim-majority areas of the USSR. And for the next 10 years, with an expenditure of billions of dollars from the USA and Saudi Arabia, and with the recruitment of thousands of non-Afghan Muslims into the jihad (including Osama bin Laden), this army of religious zealots laid waste to the land and people of Afghanistan.”

Sending in troops to Afghanistan was a colossal blunder on the part of the USSR. If the Soviets had simply provided weapons for the Afghan government, they may have survived the “barbarians at the gates” – because ordinary Afghan people were not fanatics and most of them had supported the government’s progressive reforms.

Being unable to entice enough Afghans for this war, the CIA, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan recruited about 35,000 Muslim radicals, from 40 Islamic countries to conduct the war against the Afghan government and the Soviet forces. The CIA covertly trained and sponsored these foreign warriors, hence the fundamentalism that emerged in Afghanistan is a CIA construct. Although the mujahedeen were referred to as “freedom fighters,” they committed horrific atrocities and were terrorists of the first order.

As reported in US media, a “favourite tactic” of the mujahedeen was “to torture victims [often Russians] by first cutting off their noses, ears, and genitals, then removing one slice of skin after another,” leading to “a slow, very painful death.” The article describes Russian prisoners caged like animals and “living lives of indescribable horror.” (5) Another publication cites a journalist from the Far Eastern Economic Review reporting that “one [Soviet] group was killed, skinned and hung up in a butcher’s shop”. (6)

Despite these graphic reports, President Reagan continued to refer to the mujahedeen as “freedom fighters” and in 1985 he invited a group of them to Washington where he entertained them in the Whitehouse. Afterwards, while introducing them to the media, he stated, “These gentlemen are the moral equivalents of America’s founding fathers.” (7)

Surely Soviet soldiers were every bit as human as American soldiers – just suppose it had been American soldiers who had been skinned alive. Would President Reagan in such an instance still refer to the mujahedeen as “freedom fighters” . . . or might he have referred to them correctly as terrorists, just as the Soviets had done? Indeed, how these actions are portrayed depends on whose ox is gored.

President Reagan meets Afghan Mujahedeen Commanders at the White House in 1985 (Reagan Archives )

The Soviets succumbed to their Vietnam and withdrew their troops in February of 1989, but the war raged on, with continuing American military aid, but it took until April of 1992 before the Afghan Marxist government was finally defeated. Then for the next four years the mujahedeen destroyed much of Kabul and killed some 50,000 people as they fought amongst themselves and conducted looting and rape campaigns until the Taliban routed them and captured Kabul in September of 1996. The Taliban, trained as fanatic Muslims in Pakistan, “liberated” the country from the mujahedeen, but then established an atrocious reactionary regime. Once in power the Taliban brought in a reign of Islamist terror, especially on women. They imposed an ultra-sectarian version of Islam, closely related to Wahhabism, the ruling creed in Saudi Arabia.

The US “communist paranoia” and their policy to undermine the USSR was such that they supported and recruited the most reactionary fanatic religious zealots on the earth — and used them as a proxy army to fight communism and the USSR — in the course of which Afghanistan and its people were destroyed. But it didn’t end there. The mujahedeen metastasized and took on a life of their own, spreading to various parts of the Muslim world. They went on to fight the Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo, with the full knowledge and support of the USA. But then, ironically, having defeated what they called Soviet imperialism, these “freedom fighters” turned their sights on what they perceive to be American imperialism, particularly its support for Israel and its attacks on Muslim lands. And so a creation of the USA’s own making turned on them — the progeny of Reagan’s wonderful “freedom fighters” lashed out and America experienced September 11, 2001. But what have the US government and most American people learned from this? From their inflated opinion of themselves as the world’s “exceptional” and “indispensible” nation, as President Obama arrogantly keeps reminding the world, neither the American government nor its people have ever connected the dots. Is there anything in their recent history that could explain 9/11 to them? In a nutshell, it never occurs to them that if the USA had left the progressive Afghan Taraki government alone, there would have been no army of mujahedeen, no Soviet intervention, no war that destroyed Afghanistan, no Osama bin Laden, and hence no September 11 tragedy in the USA. Instead of reflecting on the possible causes of what occurred, and learning from this, the USA immediately resorted to war, to be followed by a series of additional wars, which brings to mind Marx’s sardonic comment in which he corrected Hegel’s observation that history repeats itself, adding that it does so “the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” In response to the USA’s demand for Osama bin Laden, the Afghan Taliban government offered to turn him over to an international tribunal, but they wanted to see evidence linking him to 9/11. (8) The USA had no such evidence and bin Laden denied having anything to do with 9/11. (9) To corroborate bin Laden’s denial, the FBI has in its records that “. . . the FBI has no hard evidence connecting bin Laden to 9/11.” (10) Right till the present time, the FBI has never changed its position on this. As became known later, the 9/11 plot was hatched in Hamburg, Germany by an Al-Qaeda cell so the 9/11 attack had nothing to do with Afghanistan. Despite the fact that 15 of the 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia and that the USA had no evidence linking Afghanistan or bin Laden to the 9/11 attack, the US launched a war on Afghanistan, and of course without UN approval, so this was an illegal war.

Even if the USA wanted to depose the Taliban government, there was no need for a war. In rare unanimity, all the anti-Taliban Afghan groups pleaded with the US government not to bomb or invade the country. (11) They pointed out that to remove the Taliban government all that the USA had to do was to force Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to stop funding the Taliban, and shortly after the regime would collapse on its own. So the USA could have had its regime change without destroying the country and killing hundreds of thousands of Afghans as well as thousands of its own troops, and having the war continue from 2001 into 2015 . . . America's longest war. If this is not farce, what is it?

And the farce continued. Once in war mode, in 2003 the US launched another illegal war, this time on Iraq, a war based on outright lies and deception – a war crime of the first order. This war was even more tragic. It killed over a million Iraqis, basically destroyed the country, and destroyed a secular society, replacing it with on-going religious fratricide. In the course of this war, the Afghan al-Qaeda moved into Iraq and served as a model for young Iraqis to fight the American invaders. Although the American forces conquered Iraq quickly, they were faced with unrelenting guerrilla warfare, which eventually led to their departure in 2011. During these years the Americans jailed thousands of young Iraqi men, and inadvertently turned most of them into fervent jihadists. Prisons such as Abu Ghraib and Bucca had an incendiary effect on the ongoing insurgency, but now these jihadists weren't called "freedom fighter" – they lost this endearing appellation in Afghanistan when American soldiers replaced Soviet soldiers.

As if the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq weren't enough, in the spring of 2011 the US surreptitiously launched the beginnings of a further war, long in planning, and this one was on Syria. Somehow "spontaneously" there was an uprising of "freedom fighters" whose objective was to overthrow Syria's secular government, which displeased the USA. Right from the beginning it was suspected that the USA was behind the uprising, since as early as 2007 General Wesley Clark stated in an interview that in 2001, a few weeks after 9/11, he was told by an American high ranking general about plans "to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran." Also in 2007, Seymour Hersh, in a much cited article, stated that "the Saudi government, with Washington's approval, would provide funds and logistical aid to weaken the government of President Bashar Assad of Syria."

The so-called "Free Syrian Army" was a creation of the US and NATO, and its objective was to provoke the Syrian police and army and once there was a deployment of tanks and armored vehicles this would supposedly justify outside military intervention under NATO's mandate of "responsibility to protect" – with the objective of doing to Syria what they had done to Libya. However, with Russia's veto at the UN this didn't work out as planned.

To resolve this setback, the CIA, together with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, proceeded to do exactly what had been done in Afghanistan – hordes of foreign Salafist Muslim "freedom fighters" were brought into Syria for the express purpose of overthrowing its secular government. With unlimited funds and American weapons, the first mercenaries were Iraqi al-Qaeda who,

ironically, came into existence in the course of fighting the American army in Iraq. They were then followed by dozens of al-Qaeda's other groups, notably al-Nusra, with its plans to change Syria's multi-racial secular society into a Sunni Islamic state.

Right from the beginning of the uprising in Syria, the US was telling the world that "Assad had to go" and that they were intervening by helping "moderates" in the Free Syrian Army to overthrow the Syrian "regime." However, to no one's surprise, the ineffective "moderate" Free Syrian Army was soon inundated with Salafist Muslim groups who proceeded to launch a series of terrorist attacks throughout Syria. The Syrian government correctly identified these attacks as being the work of terrorists, but this was dismissed by the mainstream media as propaganda. The fact that the country was beset by suicide bombings and the beheading of soldiers, civilians, journalists, aid workers, and public officials was simply ignored.

Despite these reports, the USA insisted it was only providing "assistance" to those who identified themselves as being part of the Free Syrian Army. As reported in June 2012 by the New York Times, "CIA officers are operating secretly in southern Turkey, helping allies decide which Syrian opposition fighters across the border will receive arms to fight the Syrian government... The weapons, including automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries including Syria's Muslim Brotherhood and paid for by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the officials said."

In addition, after the Gaddafi Libyan government was deposed in August 2011 by al-Qaeda forces, supported by NATO bombing, the CIA arranged for the transfer of Libyan weapons to Syrian rebels. As reported in the UK Times and by Seymour Hersh, a Libyan ship docked in Turkey with 400 tonnes of armaments, including forty SAM-7 surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles, rocket-propelled grenades, and other munitions. Then in early 2013 a further major arms shipment, known as the Great Croatian Weapons Airlift, consisted of 3,000 tonnes of military weaponry from Croatia, Britain and France, coordinated by the CIA. This was flown out of Zagreb, Croatia, in 75 transport planes to Turkey for distribution to "worthy" Syrian mercenaries. In a further report, the New York Times (March 24, 2013) stated that it was Saudi Arabia that paid for these weapons and that there were actually 160 military cargo flights.

Despite all the efforts of the USA, NATO, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to support the various groups that formed the Free Syrian Army, Syrian government forces continued to rout and defeat them. Moreover, many of these 'moderate' forces were defecting and joining militant jihadist groups. Then in early 2014 an apparently unknown military force appeared on the scene, seemingly from "out of nowhere" and began to make spectacular military gains. It had a number of names, one being the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) but then it became simply the Islamic State (IS) or Daesh in Arabic. It got worldwide attention when in a matter of days it took over a quarter of Iraq, including the second largest city, Mosul – caused the Iraqi army to flee and disintegrate, and threatened to attack Baghdad. Shortly after, the beheading of two American journalists

baited the US to once again send forces to Iraq and to begin a bombing campaign on ISIS forces in both Iraq and Syria.

Before its attack on Iraq, ISIS already had a strong base in Syria, and then with tanks and artillery captured from the Iraqi army in Mosul, ISIS now controls almost a third of Syria. Hence at present it covers an area almost the size of Britain, with a population of about six million. ISIS does not recognize the borders of Syria and Iraq and considers the area under its control to be the frontiers of a Caliphate state with a militant vision of Islam. This is the direct result of the desert storm of Saudi cash that has been spent on global Wahhabi proselytizing and indoctrination, resulting in a reactionary medieval, toxic “religion” – that has nothing to do with legitimate Islam.

At the beginning, the “Islamic State” was nothing more than an appendage of al-Qaeda – with al-Qaeda itself being directly armed, funded, and backed by stalwart US allies, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, with the full support Turkey. And behind all this was the desire of the USA and NATO to undermine and destroy the secular government of Syria. As Patrick Cockburn stated in a recent perceptive article, “The foster parents of Isis and the other Sunni jihadi movements in Iraq and Syria are Saudi Arabia, the Gulf monarchies and Turkey.” He cites the former head of MI6 saying that ‘Such things do not happen spontaneously.’ Cockburn states further that “It’s unlikely the Sunni community as a whole in Iraq would have lined up behind Isis without the support Saudi Arabia . . . Turkey’s role has been different but no less significant than Saudi Arabia’s in aiding Isis and other jihadi groups. Its most important action has been to keep open its 510-mile border with Syria. This gave Isis, al-Nusra and other opposition groups a safe rear base from which to bring in men and weapons. . . . Turkish military intelligence may have been heavily involved in aiding Isis when it was reconstituting itself in 2011.”

Following its policy of trying to have full spectrum dominance in the world, the US has not hesitated to support terrorist groups when it was in their interests, e.g., the creation of the mujahedeen and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. While they fought the Soviets they were “freedom fighters,” but then came the blowback of 9/11 . . . and they instantly became terrorists, resulting in America’s “War on Terror.” The illegal war of aggression on and military occupation of Iraq resulted in the creation of a resistance movement – a new variant of al-Qaeda, viewed of course as terrorists. Then came the “attack” on the Assad government in Syria, launched by American, NATO, Saudi, Qatar and Turkish campaigns. At first it was in the guise of indigenous “freedom fighters”, the Free Syrian Army, but when they made little headway, additional “freedom fighters” appeared, in the form of al-Qaeda, in all its varieties, culminating in ISIS. These erstwhile terrorists now became allies in the campaign to depose Syria’s Assad government. Although Syria viewed them correctly as foreign terrorists, their claims were largely ignored . . . until two American journalists were beheaded.

At about the same time that the American journalists were beheaded there was fierce fighting going on in Syria and wherever Syrian soldiers were captured they were summarily executed, with many being beheaded, all this being meticulously filmed. A large number of websites show

this but one in particular, entitled “Syrianfight: Documenting War Crimes in Syria” shows dozens of gruesome execution scenes, including the mass execution in August 2014 of 220 Syrian soldiers near the Tabqa airbase. Just imagine if 220 American soldiers had been executed and beheaded what an outcry there would have been. Instead, the mainstream media concentrated solely on the two beheaded journalists, which indeed was an outrage, but where was the outrage for the hundreds of beheaded Syrian soldiers? Basically, nothing was said about what ISIS was doing in Syria.

Although there was outrage in the USA about what ISIS had done to two American citizens, there was practically no soul searching about the cause of this religious extremism and the possibility that this was just another case of blowback from what the USA had done to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Not surprisingly, the USA’s response was to announce a series of air strikes to “degrade” the capability of ISIS, but there were also to be “no boots on the ground” so actually the military defeat of ISIS was left unresolved – perhaps purposefully. In reality, the sudden military power of ISIS left the West and its regional allies – Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey – with a quandary: their official policy is to depose Assad, but ISIS is now the only effective military force in Syria so if the Syrian government is deposed, it would be ISIS that would fill the vacuum. So, was the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the assault on Syria in 2011 going to result in the creation of a powerful jihadi state spanning northern Iraq and Syria? Under such a fanatic Wahhabi regime, what would happen to the multicultural and multi-religious society of Syria?

In the face of this stark reality, as summed up by Patrick Cockburn: “. . . the US and its allies have responded to the rise of Isis by descending into fantasy. They pretend they are fostering a ‘third force’ of moderate Syrian rebels to fight both Assad and Isis, though in private Western diplomats admit this group doesn’t really exist outside a few beleaguered pockets.” Moreover, as soon as such forces are trained and equipped great numbers of them proceed to join al-Nusra or ISIS, e.g., 3,000 of them this past January. But is there method behind this obvious delusion? Is it really the intent of the US and its allies to bumble along and let ISIS proceed to defeat the Syrian army? And once this fanatic Sunni Wahhabi regime takes over Syria, is the next stage to be an attack on Shiite Iran, the next Muslim country to be destroyed? The boots on the ground in such a venture would be those of ISIS.

To counter this Machiavellian possibility, there has recently been evidence that perhaps at some level there is the realization that the permanent establishment of a fanatic Caliphate state with a militant vision of Islam is perhaps not such a good idea. What until recently has seemed to be a matter beyond the realm of possibility, there now appears evidence the US may be prepared to actually deal with President Assad of Syria. As reported in the New York Times (Jan. 15 and Jan. 19, 2015) the UN envoy for the crisis in Syria is trying to convince the Syrian government and ISIS to “freeze” the fighting on the ground, in area by area, and then somehow try to end the war. President Assad has been receptive to the idea, but there has been no response from ISIS. Also, on Russia’s initiative, a meeting is taking place in Moscow to prepare for a conference that

will try to resolve the Syria crisis. The good news is that the US has become supportive of both courses of action.

Another sign of encouragement has been the publication in Foreign Affairs (Jan 27, 2015) of a lengthy wide-ranging interview with President Assad. This is important for both the members of the US government and the American public in general. Assad has stated that he would be prepared to meet with anyone but not with “a puppet of Qatar or Saudi Arabia or any Western country, including the United States, paid from the outside. It should be Syrian.” Also he stated that any resolution that comes from a conference would have to “go back to the people through a referendum” before it would be adopted. What could be more democratic than such a procedure? Through such a course of action Syria could retain its secular status and evolve into a true democratic state.

Hence despite the viciousness of the ongoing war in Syria, these events offer a glimmer of hope that might end this foreign-inspired conflagration that has left over 220,000 dead, a million wounded and millions more displaced. But if it turns out that ISIS will refuse to end its attacks on Syria, the rational thing for the US to do would be to stop its campaign to overthrow the Syrian government and to then cooperate with Syria to defeat the ISIS forces. With coordinated US and Syrian air strikes, the Syrian army would provide the necessary “boots on the ground” to defeat Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabi gift to this area. But is this simply beyond the realm of possibility?

A short summary is in order. First, to what extent are the US and its allies responsible for the creation of ISIS and its co-partner al-Qaeda as well as its various spin-off groups? At the very beginning, we must recall that it was the USA that created the mujahedeen and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, and later got the blowback of 9/11. It was the US invasion of Iraq that created al-Qaeda as a resistance movement. It was the USA that fomented the uprising in Syria and when their Free Syrian Army was facing defeat, to the rescue came Iraqi al-Qaeda, with unlimited financial support and direction from the USA’s allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and tactical assistance from Turkey. And it’s this al-Qaeda that metastasized into ISIS. Also, the US has generated additional enemies through its drone campaign, especially in Yemen and Pakistan.

But is this all there is to this story? An offshoot from it is the recent attack in Paris on Charlie Hebdo magazine that left 12 people dead, including its editor and prominent cartoonists. It was apparently done by men connected to al-Qaeda who had been outraged by the magazine’s derogatory cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad. The attack sparked a massive outcry, with millions in France and across the world taking to the streets to support freedom of the press behind the rallying cry of “Je suis Charlie,” or “I am Charlie.”

It’s instructive to put this matter in historical context. In Nazi Germany, there was an anti-Semitic newspaper called Der Stürmer, noted for its morbid caricatures of Jews. Its editor, Julius Streicher, was put on trial at Nürnberg and hanged because of his stories and cartoons about Jews. In 1999 during its bombing campaign on Serbia, NATO deliberately bombed a Radio/TV

station in Belgrade, killing 16 journalists. The US bombed the Al Jazeera headquarters in Kabul in 2001 and in 2003 Al Jazeera was bombed in Baghdad, killing journalists. In its attacks on Gaza, Israel has deliberately killed a large number of journalists.

The issue of “freedom of the press” was hardly raised in the above instances – certainly there were no mass street protests. In the case of Charlie Hebdo, this was not a model of freedom of speech. In reality, Charlie Hebdo’s political pornography of Muslims is hardly any different from the way Jews were portrayed in *Der Stürmer*.

The US and its various allies have launched wars, death and destruction in many Muslim countries – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Gaza, Yemen, Syria. To add to this, Saudi Arabia has apparently spent more than \$100 billion trying to propagate its fanatical Wahhabism, a relatively small sect that is despised in the Muslim world at large, but which has nevertheless tarnished the Muslim image. And because of this, for some people in the West it’s somehow become acceptable to degrade, demean, humiliate, mock and insult Muslims. It was in this spirit that the cartoonists chose to mock Mohammad, under the guise of freedom of expression. It’s noteworthy that Charlie Hebdo had once fired a journalist because of one line he had written that was criticized by a Zionist lobby, but when it comes to Muslims, it was open season on them. In a judgment issued by US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, freedom of speech does not give one the right to “falsely shout fire in a crowded theater.” Also there is a provision in the US constitution that prohibits publishing “fighting words” which could result in violence. All this was ignored by the editors and publishers of Charlie Hebdo. The penalty should not have been death but they bear considerable responsibility for what happened. Sadly, the West’s uncritical embrace of the Charlie Hebdo caricatures was because the drawings were directed at and ridiculed Muslims. There is no question that the “desperate and despised people” of today are Muslims.

When ISIS beheaded two American journalists, there was outrage and denunciation throughout the West, but when the same ISIS beheaded hundreds of Syrian soldiers, and meticulously filmed these war crime, this was hardly reported anywhere. In addition, almost from the very beginning of the Syrian tragedy, al-Qaeda groups have been killing and torturing not only soldiers but police, government workers and officials, journalists, Christian church people, aid workers, women and children, as well as suicide bombings in market places. All this was covered up in the mainstream media, and when the Syrian government correctly denounced this as terrorism, this was ignored or denounced as “Assad’s propaganda.”

So why weren’t these atrocities reported in the western media? If this was reported it would have run counter to Washington’s proclaimed agenda that “Assad has to go,” so the mainstream media followed the official line. There is nothing new in this. History shows that the media supported every Western-launched war, insurrection and coup – the wars on Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and coups such as those on Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, Chile, and most recently in Ukraine.

And so when terrorist acts are carried out against “our enemies” they are often viewed as the actions of “freedom fighters”, but when the same types of acts are directed at “us” they are denounced as “terrorism.” So it all depends on whose ox is gored. **John Ryan, Ph.D., Retired Professor of Geography and Senior Scholar, University of Winnipeg.** [jryan13@mymts.net](mailto:jryan13@mymts.net)

#### Notes:

1. Fred Halliday, “Revolution in Afghanistan,” *New Left Review*, No. 112, pp. 3-44, 1978.
2. I was in Afghanistan in November 1978 working on an agricultural research project while on sabbatical leave and all these reforms and government measures were explained to me at considerable length by the Dean of Agriculture and some of the professors during a lengthy session at Kabul University. Halliday (cited above) also reported on the land-redistribution program.
3. *Washington Post*, December 23, 1979, p.A8. Soviet troops had started arriving in Afghanistan on December 8, to which the article states: “There was no charge [by the State Department] that the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan, since the troops apparently were invited.”
4. “How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen”: Interview of Zbigniew Brzezinski Le *Nouvel Observateur* (France), Jan 15-21, 1998, p. 76 <http://www.counterpunch.org/brzezinski.html>
5. *Washington Post*, January 13, 1985.
6. John Fullerton, *The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan*, (London), 1984.
7. Eqbal Ahmad, “Terrorism: Theirs and Ours,” (A Presentation at the University of Colorado, Boulder, October 12, 1993) <http://www.sangam.org/ANALYSIS/Ahmad.htm>; Cullen Murphy, “The
8. Gold Standard: The quest for the Holy Grail of equivalence,” *Atlantic Monthly*, January 2002 <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/200201/murphy>
9. “Taliban repeats call for negotiations,” *CNN.com*, October 2, 2001, includes comment: “Afghanistan’s ruling Taliban repeated its demand for evidence before it would hand over suspected terrorist leader Osama bin Ladin.” <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/10/02/ret.afghan.taliban/>; Noam Chomsky, “The War on Afghanistan,” *Znet*, December 30, 2001 <http://www.globalpolicy.org/wtc/targets/1230chomsky.htm>
10. “Bin Laden says he wasn’t behind attacks,” *CNN.com*, September 17, 2001. <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/16/inv.binladen.denial/>
11. Ed Haas, “FBI says, it has ‘No hard evidence connecting Bin Laden to 9/11’,” *Muckraker Report*, June 6, 2006. <http://www.teamliberty.net/id267.html>
12. Noam Chomsky, “The War on Afghanistan,” *Znet*, December 30, 2001 <http://www.globalpolicy.org/wtc/targets/1230chomsky.htm>; Barry Bearak, “Leaders of the Old Afghanistan Prepare for the New,” *NYT*, October 25, 2001; John Thornhill and Farhan Bokhari, “Traditional leaders call for peace jihad,” *FT*, October 25, 2001; “Afghan peace assembly call,” *FT*, October 26, 2001; John Burns, “Afghan Gathering in Pakistan

Backs Future Role for King,” NYT, October 26, 2001; Indira Laskhmanan, “1,000 Afghan leaders discuss a new regime, BG, October 25, 26, 2001.