The Covert Strengthening of Islamic Extremists under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush

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ABSTRACT

Some political analysts in the U.S. manage to remain objective as they examine a particular subject. However, there are many who let their political leanings impact the conclusions that they reach in their respective publications. An analyst with a conservative bias will usually seek to enhance the image of a Republican by comparing him to Ronald Reagan and other revered figures that were associated with the Grand Old Party at one time. In 2001, George W. Bush signed a bill that substantially cut taxes in the United States. Shortly after this turn of events, various conservative writers started to compare him to Reagan since he also provided American taxpayers with relief during his first term in office.

Keywords: Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, George W. Bush, Hard Targets, Ronald Reagan

INTRODUCTION

Some political analysts in the U.S. manage to remain objective as they examine a particular subject. However, there are many who let their political leanings impact the conclusions that they reach in their respective publications. An analyst with a conservative bias will usually seek to enhance the image of a Republican by comparing him to Ronald Reagan and other revered figures that were associated with the Grand Old Party at one time. In 2001, George W. Bush signed a bill that substantially cut taxes in the United States. Shortly after this turn of events, various conservative writers started to compare him to Reagan since he also provided American taxpayers with relief during his first term in office. As Bush’s first term in office continued, these analysts kept searching for similarities between him and his predecessor. During his time in office, Reagan called America’s global rival the evil empire. While Bush was delivering his State of the Union Address in January 2002, he referred to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as an axis of evil. This reference prompted one conservative analyst to insist that Bush “was following in the footsteps of Ronald Reagan” on the foreign front (Podhoretz 2007, p.49).

What these conservative analysts have overlooked is the fact that Bush made some of the same errors as Reagan on the world stage.
In the 1980s, Reagan provided weapons and training to dissidents who were attempting to generate political change in Afghanistan. This covert initiative turned out to be problematic because some of these revolutionaries later taught others how to use a potent weapon against the U.S. and Afghanistan became a territory where Islamic extremist networks could prepare for terrorist attacks. Under George W. Bush, another clandestine mission was launched in Somalia that helped Islamic radicals. While it was in progress, there was a considerable increase in instability throughout Somalia. Consequently, an Islamist organization was able to gird for terrorist operations on Somali territory. Within the upcoming pages, these damaging clandestine missions from the Bush and Reagan presidencies will be examined in greater detail.

COVERT MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN DURING THE REAGAN YEARS

Within authoritarian nations, there is usually ideological homogeneity because only one political party is allowed to be prevalent. Inside democratic countries, ideological heterogeneity can be found since multiple political parties are permitted to participate in the political process. The leaders of a political party do not possess an affinity for the other parties, but there are occasions when they conclude that it would be advantageous to cooperate with one of these rivals. Towards the end of the 1990s, the Labour Party assumed control of the British government. This turn of events did not sit well with the individuals in the Conservative Party who had been controlling the United Kingdom for a number of years. These conservatives were presented with a good opportunity to regain control of England as the first decade of the twenty-first century was coming to an end. Around this time, several stories began to appear in British newspapers that were quite damaging to the Labour Party, including reports of party corruption. In 2010, some analysts were predicting that the nationwide elections would result in a conservative landslide. However, this party did not even manage to secure enough votes to take complete control of the British government. Since the Conservative leaders were unable to get the necessary amount of votes, they opted to form a coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party, another organization that had been attempting to bring an end to Labour’s dominance in Britain.

As a person turns his or her attention to the international level, he or she can also come across the formation of temporary alliances between ideological rivals. During the early part of the twentieth century, capitalist, communist and fascist blocs were present on the world stage. There were eventually signs that the members of the first two blocs were working together to weaken the third. In 1935, France, a capitalist country, and the Soviet Union, a communist nation, agreed to “come to each other’s aid in the event of either being subjected to aggression” (Carr 1982, p.150). Later that year, the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International was held. While the previous meetings of this transnational revolutionary organization were in progress, the major focal point of the delegates was developing viable strategies for engineering anti-capitalist rebellions. However, this topic did not dominate the proceedings at the Seventh Congress. Instead, speakers emphasized how it was imperative to stop fascism. By the end of the Congress, they concurred that “the main target was no longer bourgeois capitalism, but Fascist imperialism” (Carr 1982, p.417).

After the fascist bloc was eliminated, the capitalist and communist blocs once again competed against each other. The former started to receive invaluable assistance in this struggle when an Islamic extremist bloc emerged during the latter stages of the twentieth century. An objective of these extremists was toppling governments in Muslim countries that were closely aligned with the Soviet Union. One country, which they thought was in need of political change, was Afghanistan. For a good portion of the 1970s, this nation was controlled by Moham-