Secret affairs with radical Islam: why Britain's covert foreign policy needs to change

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The British and American response to the 'global war on terror' has put a premium on secrecy in the name of 'national security.' **Adam Brown** *argues that the UK government has covered-up both past human rights abuses by its own or allied armed forces and intelligence services, and its collusion with Islamic extremists for political and economic expediency. Yet both policies denying transparency have ultimately made Britain and the West less secure.*

Earlier this year the case of Binyam Mohamed resulted in the severe condemnation, by one of Britain's most senior judges, of Britain's Security Service, finding that they had "failed to respect human rights, deliberately misled parliament and had a "culture of suppression" that undermined government assurances about its conduct ." It was shown that MI5 officers were complicit in the ill treatment of a British resident, causing him "significant mental stress and suffering" – he had been tortured. Such was the severity of Judge Neuberger's draft judgement, that MI5 lawyer Jonathan Sumption QC, privately wrote to the court asking that the judgement be reconsidered before being handed down.

The British government's response to this case was denial and attempts to judicially suppress the classified information exposed by the case from the public. American CIA agents were also implicated in the human rights violations and as foreign secretary David Miliband argued, the case was causing a "great deal of concern" in the US and that the release of such material could endanger intelligence sharing between the two countries.

This response by the British and American governments is endemic of a larger trend within the 'global war on terror' that has put a premium on secrecy in the name of "national security." This has been reflected by the aggressive posture taken by the Pentagon in recent weeks over the Wikileaks Iraq war logs.

Secrecy to a certain extent is necessary for the functioning and security of a modern state, however, when this extends to breaching human rights and engineering war, securing energy resources or colluding with terrorists, it removes democratic accountability, restricting decisions to a few individuals working within the secret service apparatus. This can have disastrous results for civil society and the current 'war on terror' is no exception.

The West has been activity fostering and aiding Islamic terrorists and groups, for over fifty years, however, rarely has this information entered the mainstream debate on terrorism and its causes. The media often portray the emergence of terrorism, particularly Islamic terrorism, as an anomaly, born out of a new post-Cold War era. Like most things, however, it has not appeared out of thin air.

The West, predominately Britain and the United States, have covertly used radical Islamic groups and individuals to further their foreign policy objectives. These groups have aided Western interests in installing pro-Western monarchies and dictatorships throughout Asia and the Middle East while providing for economic opportunities in oil and arms deals – stretching from Azerbaijan to Afghanistan.

Britain has covertly supported Pakistan's intelligence agency (ISI), an agency responsible for training thousands of terrorists, three of who ended up being directly involved in the 7/7 attacks. Osama bin Laden, perhaps the most infamous terrorist of our time, along with fellow jihadists (Adel Abdel Bary and Ibrahim Eidarous) used London as their global HQ. In 1994 Bin Laden opened an office in Wembley, North London, under the name of the Advice and Reformation Committee. From this office he launched his worldwide jihad.

Darul Islam in Indonesia, Jamaat-i-Islam in Pakistan and the Muslim Brotherhood globally, are all examples of extremist groups, covertly or overtly supported by the West, who have left their ideological imprint on modern day terrorist groups. Given this covert history covering the past fifty years to present, 9/11 and 7/7 can be seen as the result of a Western foreign policy backfiring in a spectacular way.

Despite this, secret intelligence agencies and government officials often act as if they are complacent and just as surprised as all of us by this sudden emerging threat. They go to great lengths to suppress and distance government policy from any misgivings with terrorists or illegal activity they may be engaged in.

Only recently did Sir John Sawers, head of the Secret Intelligence Services, appear on national television telling us that MI6 has "nothing whatsoever" to do with torture and that the SIS adheres to international law.

The first steps in securing Western society from the terrorist threat is not removing shoes at airports or installing more surveillance cameras in communities, but rather tempering the current culture of secrecy and allowing the democratic process to function better through more open information. Secondly, we need to reflect on our foreign policy and put an end to the covert overseas affairs that the public has unknowingly been apart of for the past fifty years.

This article was first posted on the LSE's [‘Global War on Terror’ blog](#).

For further information on Britain's (and to some extent the US') history of collusion with radical Islam, historian Mark Curtis provides an exemplary account in his book [Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam](#) . Also worth reading is former CIA operative Bob Baer who provides an extraordinary account of covert actions and consequences in the Middle East: [See No Evil: The True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism](#)