

CIA Links to the Muslim Brotherhood Alleged

BOOK: A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, The CIA, and the Muslim Brotherhood in the West

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Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and Wall Street Journal reporter Ian Johnson discusses his most recent book, "A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Muslim Brotherhood in the West," May 18, at the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C.

For most of us living in the United States, our first contact with extremist Islamic ideology came after the 9/11 attack by Islamic militants. Others may recall the Afghan Islamic freedom fighters, the mujahideen, against the Soviet Union in the late 1970s, whom we supplied with weapons. At the time, we didn't care a whole lot about fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. But that would change after we were attacked.

The arming by the West of the mujahideen was likely primed by the experiences of U.S. intelligence had with the Muslim Brotherhood, going back to the 1950s, according to Wall Street Journal reporter Ian Johnson.

In his new book, "A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA and the Muslim Brotherhood in the West," Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist tells a story of covert operations, Cold War rivalries, historical personalities and intrigue behind the origins of political Islam. Today, the most articulate and influential leaders of political Islam

(Gary Feuerberg/ Epoch Times)

are members of the Islamic Brotherhood, which former Nazis

and the CIA had a role in nurturing.

Johnson's search for the origins of the Afghan fighters begins three decades earlier, when there was a psychological war for control of Muslims living in Germany. He interweaves his story around three distinct groups: the Germans, the Americans, and the Muslim Brotherhood and their focus of interest in a mosque in Munich, known as the Islamic Center of Munich. This mosque is not famous because of its religious origins or piety, but for its political significance.

The Germans

Johnson begins with the Nazis and their realization during World War II that many ethnic minorities living under control of the communist state hated their oppressors. There were around 30 million Muslims in the Soviet Union, and the communists before and during the war had been opposed to religion, closing mosques, and persecuting those who practiced their faith. The Nazis easily recruited many of their prisoners of war, such as Tatars, Georgians, Chechens, Kazakhs, Uzbeks in areas bordering Russia—the Ukraine, the Caucasus, Baltic states, and Turkistan—to fight the Soviet Union. These soldiers were also employed in the Wehrmacht's Ostministerium, which oversaw the newly conquered East European territories. After the war, many thousands of these Muslims from Central Asia avoided being repatriated and stayed behind what became West Germany. The Ostministerium, with mostly the same people, was rebuilt after the war to fight communism.

Johnson focused on one key personality, Gerhard Von Mende, who led the organizing of the émigrés and continued in this same capacity for the West German government after the defeat of the Nazis. Von Mende was highly influential in persuading American intelligence of the Islam's potential value as weapon against communism. In the end the Germans were eclipsed by the Americans who had much more in the way of resources.

The Americans

The story moves on with the CIA covertly funding Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, both front organizations based in Munich, with the later beaming into the Soviet Union itself. The Americans took over Von Mende's program "lock, stock and barrel," said Johnson, at the New America Foundation, May 18. Radio Liberty relied heavily on the émigrés, composing between 75 and 80 percent of their employees, according to one estimate.

The former Nazi collaborators denied they had believed in the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, which Johnson found hard to accept for the higher level managers.

The CIA, through front organizations, sent émigrés to international conferences, such as the Bandung conference in Indonesia in 1955, where they could distribute propaganda, and criticize the treatment Muslims received in the Soviet Union, and which influenced third world countries. CIA agents also went on more than one Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Muslims working for Radio Liberty were easily discredited by the Soviets as Nazi stooges. They would be exposed also at international conferences as working for the CIA and for their Nazi past. These Muslims from the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany

had no or little religious education, and so also lacked credibility as religiously observant Muslims, said Johnson. The Americans looked for more credible Muslims and finally found their man in Egyptian Dr. Said Ramadan, an anticommunist and a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Muslim Brotherhood

The third cast of characters is the Muslim radicals who eventually take control of the mosque and lead it in a different direction that becomes the foundation for extremist Islam, and an enormous influence for Muslims in Europe. Johnson uses the term “Islamism” or “political Islam” for a movement in the 20th century that endeavors to revive Islam with a brand of Islam that pursues an overtly political agenda.

Characteristics of Islamism include rejecting Western secular values, interpreting the Koran literally, and a rejection of the idea that historical context be taken into account when interpreting ancient texts. It uses a Western style political organization, fascistic controls, and rejects the separation of the state and religion. It holds that anyone, including a Muslim, who doesn't subscribe to its fundamentalist views can be killed as an apostate.

The most influential stream from this movement is the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928. A follower of Banna, Said Ramadan married one of Banna's daughters and had all the qualities to become a new Muslim leader—eloquent spokesman, educated lawyer, and organizer. The U.S. liked him for a number of reasons: he appealed to youth at the mosque, he vigorously opposed communist states, and he had no Nazi past to sully the relationship.

Due to the Brotherhood's anti-Semitic doctrines and opposition to the founding of the state of Israel, the U.S. could never formally admit to being connected to Ramadan or the Brotherhood. Johnson has tried repeatedly through FOI to learn the nature of these ties, but his requests are always refused on national security grounds. But all the indications are that Dr. Ramadan and the Muslim Brotherhood were paid by the CIA to go to pan-European Muslim conferences where anti-communist stands were taken, says Johnson.

Since the Brotherhood is still a force in the world, it would be “embarrassing or compromising to show early dealings with the Brotherhood. It would be embarrassing to the Brotherhood also,” said Johnson.

As Ramadan withdrew or was eased out, eventually the mosque and the Islamic Center of Munich came under the control of different leaders of the Islamic Brotherhood, less radical theorists and more pragmatic, and tied to Saudi and Libya money and Arab dominance. The Islamic Center of Munich from ca. 1975 to 2000 would “grow into a national organization, send shoots across the Atlantic and lay the cornerstone for European organizations that endure today, ensuring that the Brotherhood's version of Islam would come to be the most influential one in the West,” writes Johnson.

Johnson argues that the Brotherhood dominates the West's Muslim communities and converts Muslims to follow the Brotherhood's narrow vision of Islam. Never a mass movement, it is a group of elite organizers who have set up structures to define Islam for the West. It lobbies for European Muslims and meets with the Vatican and the European Union.

Johnson said that we should not be lulled into believing the Brotherhood is a picture of reason and tolerance. “The problem for me is that the Muslim Brotherhood creates a milieu that leads to terrorism, ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality, a bifurcated world view.” Johnson isn’t saying that anyone who comes into contact with the Brotherhood becomes a terrorist, but it helps facilitate it.