

State Terrorism and September 11, 1973 & 2001

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On the morning of September 11 I watched aircraft flying overhead. Minutes later I heard explosive sounds and saw fireballs of smoke fill the sky. As a result of these attacks thousands died, including two good friends of mine.

I am not writing about September 11 2001 in New York City. On that date I was thousands of miles away in Berkeley, California. I am writing about another September 11, equally horrible, that occurred in 1973 when I was living in Santiago, Chile. On that date I indeed saw planes flying overhead. They were warplanes and their target was the presidential palace in Santiago. Remarkably, these two September 11's are related in a number of ways, and both dates help us understand why George W. Bush has lead the United States into a quagmire in Iraq.

On September 11, 1973 Salvador Allende resided in the Chilean presidential palace. He was the first freely elected socialist leader in the world and ever since his electoral victory in September 1970, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US government headed by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger who chaired the National Security Council were determined to overthrow Allende and his Popular Unity coalition.

It was on September 11, 1973 that they finally succeeded. Lead by General Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean military overthrew Allende who died in the presidential palace. Over three thousand people perished in the bloody repression that followed under Pinochet's rule, including two American friends of mine, Charles Horman and Frank Terrugi.

Prior to the attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 the most sensational foreign-lead terrorist action in the capitol had been carried out by a team of operatives sent by the Pinochet regime. On September 21, 1976, agents of the Chilean secret police organization, DINA, detonated a car bomb just blocks from the White House, killing a leading opponent of Pinochet's, Orlando Letelier, and his assistant Ronni Moffitt. Letelier, who I spoke to at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington D.C. before his death, was a man deeply committed to democracy and a more humane world who had served at the highest levels of the Allende government.

These assassinations were linked to the first international terrorist network in the Western Hemisphere, known as Operation Condor. Begun in 1974 at the instigation of the Chilean secret police, Operation Condor was a sinister cabal comprised of the intelligence services of at least six South American countries that collaborated in tracking, kidnapping and assassinating political opponents. Based on documents divulged under the Chile Declassification Project of the Clinton administration, it is now recognized that the CIA knew about these international terrorist activities and may have even abetted them.

After the murders of Letelier-Moffitt in Washington D.C., the CIA appears to have concluded that Condor was a rogue operation and may have tried to contain its activities. However, the network of Southern Cone military and intelligence operations continued to act throughout Latin America at least until the early 1980s. Chilean and Argentine military units assisted the dictator Anastasio

Somoza in Nicaragua and helped set up death squads in El Salvador. Argentine units also aided and supervised Honduran military death squads that began operating in the early 1980s with the direct assistance and collaboration the CIA.

Similarities abound between the emergence of terrorist networks in Latin America and events leading to the rise of al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden first became involved in militant Islamic activities when he went to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight with the Mujahidin against the Soviet-backed regime that had taken power in the country. According to the CIA 2000 Fact Book, the Mujahidin were “supplied and trained by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others.” Even in the 1980s it was widely recognized that many of those fighting against the Soviets and the Afghan government were religious fanatics who had no loyalty to their US sponsors, let alone to “western values” like democracy, religious tolerance and gender equality.

Ronald Reagan in the mid-1980s, when the CIA was backing the Mujahideen warriors in Afghanistan, likened them to our “founding fathers.” Then in Central America, Reagan called thousands of former soldiers of Somoza’s National Guard “freedom fighters” as they were sent to fight against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. And when the Sandinistas went to the World Court to press charges against the United States for sending special operatives to bomb its major port facility in Corinto, the Reagan administration withdrew from the Court, refusing to acknowledge the rule of international law.

In the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, former US government officials and conservative pundits attempted to completely rewrite this sordid history. Instead of acknowledging that past CIA operations had gone awry, they insisted that bin Laden’s international terrorist network had flourished because earlier US collaboration with terrorists had been constrained or curtailed. Henry Kissinger who was in Germany on September 11, 2001, told the TV networks that the controls imposed on US intelligence operations over the years facilitated the rise of international terrorism. He alluded to the hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1975 headed by Senator Frank Church, which strongly criticized the covert operations approved by Kissinger when he headed up the National Security Council. The Church hearings lead to the first legal restrictions on CIA activities, including the prohibition of US assassinations of foreign leaders.

Other Republicans, including George Bush Sr. who was director of the CIA when the agency worked with many of these terrorist networks, pointed the finger at the Clinton administration for allegedly undermining foreign intelligence operations. They argued vehemently against the 1995 presidential order prohibiting the CIA from paying and retaining foreign operatives involved in torture and death squads. These foreign policy hawks were standing historic reality on its head.

Today, two years later we see the consequences of the refusal of the administration of George W. Bush to learn the proper lessons of the past. Instead of ending US transgressions of the borders and sovereign rights of other nations, the United States has spread carnage and war, violating fundamental civil liberties and human rights at home and abroad.

Like many advocates of a world based on law rather than violence, Judge Baltasar Garzón, who issued the warrant for the arrest of Pinochet in London in 1998, proclaimed on the eve of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001: “Lasting peace and freedom can be achieved only with legality, justice, respect for diversity, defense of human rights and measured and fair responses.” The failure of the United States to bring stability to Iraq and Afghanistan, along with stepped up terrorist activities around the world, demonstrate that the US war against terror is a failure.

But even in the midst of this war, judges, lawyers and human rights activists around the world remain determined to see that international justice is carried out. Using the principle of “universal

jurisdiction” employed by Judge Garzon to pursue Pinochet, nineteen citizens of Iraq filed suit in Belgium courts in May against Tommy Franks, the commander of the US invasion. They charged that troops under his command stood idly by as hospitals in Baghdad were looted, while other US soldiers fired on ambulances that were carrying wounded civilians. The Bush administration reacted angrily, threatening the Belgium government with “diplomatic consequences” if it allowed the case to go forward.

Then when US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld attended a meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels in June 2003, he threatened to end US financing for new NATO facilities and to move the headquarters to another country if the Belgium government would not intervene to suspend the court cases. Kowtowing to his demands, the Belgium parliament altered its laws relating to universal jurisdiction. But as we achieve some distance from the war, and perhaps a ‘regime change’ in the United States, investigations and charges will be brought against the US invaders of Iraq in other countries for their human rights abuses and lies about the war, perhaps even in US courts.

The struggle is joined. The years to come will focus on the great divide that has emerged out of the two September elevens of 1973 and 2001. On the one side stands an arrogant unilateralist clique in the United States that engages in state terrorism and human rights abuses while tearing up international treaties. On the other is a global movement that is determined to advance a broad conception of human rights and human dignity through the utilization of human rights law, extradition treaties and limited policing activities. It is fundamentally a struggle over where globalization will take us, whether the powerful economic and political interests of the world headed up by reactionary US leaders will create a new world order that relies on intervention and state terrorism, or whether a globalist perspective from below based on a more just and egalitarian conception of the world will gain ascendancy.

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P.S.

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* Roger Burbach is the author of The Pinochet Affair: State Terrorism and Global Justice.