

JE KINDLE-NOTITIES VOOR:

Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam

door Mark Curtis

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125 Highlights

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> Radical Islamic forces have been seen as useful to Whitehall in five specific ways: as a global counter-force to the ideologies of secular nationalism and Soviet communism, in the cases of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; as ‘conservative muscle’ within countries to undermine secular nationalists and bolster pro-Western regimes; as ‘shock troops’ to destabilise or overthrow governments; as proxy military forces to fight wars; and as ‘political tools’ to leverage change from governments.

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> The second objective has been maintaining Britain’s place within a pro-Western global financial order. The Saudis have invested billions of dollars in the US and British economies and banking systems and Britain and the US have similarly large investments and trade with Saudi Arabia; it is these that are being protected by the strategic alliance with Riyadh. Since the period of 1973–75, when British officials secretly made a range of deals with the Saudis to invest their oil revenues in Britain, as we shall see, there has been a tacit Anglo–American–Saudi pact to maintain this financial order, which has entailed London and Washington turning a blind eye to whatever else the Saudis spend their money on. This has been accompanied, on the Saudi side, by a strategy of bankrolling Islamist and jihadist causes and a ‘Muslim’ foreign policy aimed at maintaining the Saud family in power. In promoting its strategy, Britain has routinely

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> The coastline of the Arabian peninsula could be easily controlled by the British navy. By championing an Arabian kingdom under British auspices, Britain was exerting its dominance over the spiritual leadership of the Muslim world. Indeed, Britain was helping Islam to reclaim its roots and return to its origins.

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> After the war, Lawrence wrote a report for the British Cabinet entitled ‘Reconstruction of Arabia’, arguing that it was urgent for the British and their allies to find a Muslim leader who could counter the Ottoman empire’s attempted jihad against them in the name of the caliph:

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> The benefit of division in the Middle East – a key point in all these documents – was also recognised by the foreign department of the British government of India: ‘What we want’, it stated, ‘is not a United Arabia, but a weak and disunited Arabia, split up into little principalities so far as possible under our suzerainty – but incapable of coordinated action against us, forming a buffer against the Powers in the West.’27

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> Confrontation over the future of Arabia ensued between Hussein and another British protégé, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, an emir and rising power in central Arabia whose forces had captured the Nejd region with its capital at Riyadh. British officials had been split on who to champion as the leader of the revolt against the Turks – the British government of India had feared British sponsorship of an Arab caliph who would lead the entire Muslim world, and the effects this might have on Muslims in India, and had therefore favoured Ibn Saud, whose pretensions were limited to Arabia. In contrast to Hussein’s orthodox Sunnism, the future founder of Saudi Arabia sat at the head of an ultra-conservative Sunni revivalist movement, now known as Wahhabism, which professed a strict adherence to the tenets of Islam, and which had developed in the eighteenth century based on the teaching of the theologian, Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahhab, born in 1703. Ibn Saud’s military forces were the Ikhwan, or Brotherhood, a militia of Bedouin tribesmen instructed by religious teachers who were committed to the purification of Islam and the advancement of government based on strict Islamic law. Britain had already provided arms and money to Ibn Saud during the First World War, signing a treaty with him in 1915 and recognising him as the ruler of the Nejd province under British protection. By the end of the war, he was receiving a British subsidy of £5,000 a month28 – considerably less than the £12,000 a month doled out to Hussein, whom the British government at first continued to favour. That some British officials were pinning their strategic hopes on Ibn Saud during the war is

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> Ibn Saud established ‘Saudi’ Arabia in an orgy of murder. In his exposé of the corruption of the Saudi ruling family, Said Aburish describes Ibn Saud as ‘a lecher and a bloodthirsty autocrat … whose savagery wreaked havoc across Arabia’, terrorising and mercilessly slaughtering his enemies. The conquest of Arabia cost the lives of around 400,000 people, since Saud’s forces did not take prisoners; over a million people fled to neighbouring countries. Numerous rebellions against the House of Saud subsequently took place, each put down in ‘mass killings of mostly innocent victims, including women and children’. By the mid-1920s most of Arabia had been subdued, 40,000 people had been publicly executed and some 350,000 had had limbs amputated; the territory was divided into districts under the control of Saud’s relatives, a situation which largely prevails today.30 The British recognised Ibn Saud’s control of Arabia,

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> and by 1922 his subsidy was raised to £100,000 a year by Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill.31 At the same time, Churchill described Ibn Saud’s

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> Wahhabis as akin to the present-day Taliban, telling the House of Commons in July 1921 that they were ‘austere, intolerant, well-armed and bloodthirsty’ and that ‘they hold it as an article of duty, as well as of faith, to kill all who do not share their opinions and to make slaves of their wives and children. Women have been put to death in Wahhabi villages for simply appearing in the streets. It is a penal offence to wear a silk garment. Men have been killed for smoking a cigarette.’32

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> 1917 London had dispatched Harry St John Philby – father of Kim, the later Soviet spy – to Saudi Arabia, where he remained until Ibn Saud’s death in 1953.34 Philby’s role was ‘to consult with the Foreign Office over ways to consolidate the rule and extend the influence’ of Ibn Saud. A 1927 treaty ceded control of the country’s foreign affairs to Britain. When elements of the Ikhwan, opposed to the British presence in the country, rebelled against the regime in 1929, Ibn Saud called for British support. The RAF and troops from the British-controlled army in neighbouring Iraq were dispatched, and the rebellion was put down the following year. Ibn Saud highly appreciated Britain’s support for him, especially during the rebellion, and this paved the way for the development of relations between the Saudi kingdom and the West that became the core of Saudi foreign policy. 35 Following the consolidation of the Saudi–British alliance, Ibn Saud relegated the Ikhwan’s role to that of educating and monitoring public morality. But the power of Wahhabism had already transformed Bedouins into mujahideen – holy warriors – for whom devotion to the ummah transcended tribal affiliations. In subsequent decades, the Ikhwan’s jihadist conquest of the Arabian peninsula by the sword and the Koran would be constantly invoked in Saudi Arabian teaching.36 Officially proclaimed in 1932, and to a large extent a British creation, Saudi Arabia would go on to act as the world’s main propagator of fundamentalist Islam, providing the ideological and financial centre of global jihadism.

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> In April 1919 British troops were withdrawn from Central Asia; in their place London provided support to Muslim guerrilla groups which had sprung up across the region to resist the Bolshevik advance. These rebels, called Basmachi (‘bandits’) by the Soviets, formed part of the army of the Bukhara emirate, the last bastion of Turkic independence in Central Asia, located mainly in modern-day Uzbekistan, near the frontiers with Afghanistan and China. During 1919, the British government in India provided camel caravans of arms and ammunition to the Basmachi via their leaders in the Afghan capital, Kabul. After the Soviets captured the city of Bukhara in 1920, Basmachi groups took to the hills to promote a guerrilla war. The following year, Moscow dispatched an Ottoman general, Enver Pasha, to pacify the rebels, but who then proceeded to switch sides and join them. Pasha proclaimed his goal to be the creation of an independent Muslim state, Turkestan, in Central Asia; his strong Islamic message won him the support of the mullahs, who rallied to his cause alongside the Muslim emir of Afghanistan. The Russians, meanwhile, declared him an agent of the British.41

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> By 1939, however, the prospect of war with Germany was looming and the British perceived the need to maintain good relations with the Arab states and to try to appease the Palestinians. Prime Minister Neville

> Chamberlain told a Cabinet meeting in April 1939 that it was of ‘immense importance … to have the Moslem world with us’ and that ‘if we must offend one side let us offend the Jews rather than the Arabs.’64 Thus after brutally defeating the rebellion, the British government enacted a White Paper in May 1939, which gave in to many Arab demands and restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine, giving the Arabs an ability to prevent the emergence of a Jewish majority. This policy, widely interpreted as repudiating the Balfour Declaration, embittered Jews everywhere and would lead to Jewish confrontation with the British after the war. Two years after the crushing of the intifada, al-Husseini

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> Husseini fled to Iraq, where in April 1941 he helped orchestrate an anti-Jewish pogrom that left over 400 Iraqi Jews dead during a Nazi-backed military coup against the pro-British government.65 The mufti called for a holy war against the British but the Iraqi coup collapsed after a British military intervention re-instated a pro-British government. Al-Husseini now fled again, this time to Berlin, where he met Hitler and other leading Nazi officials, developing a close relationship with SS chief, Heinrich Himmler. The mufti had long supported the Nazis, based on his anti-semitism and a desire to secure their support in Palestine; some German aid had been sent to the Palestinians during the intifada. Al-Husseini now helped the Nazis recruit Muslims from the Balkans to be formed into a variety of Muslim SS Divisions in Eastern Europe. With hundreds of thousands of Muslim soldiers in the Nazi war machine, Himmler adopted a policy of using Islam as a bulwark against Nazi enemies – orthodox Serbia and Russia: the strategy was an echo of the British use of Islam against the Bolsheviks and would be repeated by the British and Americans against nationalists in Bosnia and Kosovo

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> in the 1990s.66 At the end of the war, al-Husseini escaped from Germany, possibly with the help of the Allies, and was put under house arrest in France by the French authorities.67 He then escaped to Egypt, where he was given political asylum by King Farouk’s pro-British regime after appeals on his behalf by the Muslim Brotherhood.68 Requests to the British by Jewish groups to have him indicted as a war criminal were rejected by London for fear that moves against the still popular al-Husseini would increase unrest against the British presence in Egypt. Indeed, in 1946, al-Husseini began to work for the British once more, with sources suggesting that he was employed by the Arab News Agency, an MI6 front established in Cairo to spread British propaganda in the region.69 Thus, nearly a quarter of a century after first collaborating with al-Husseini, Britain was still prepared to regard the mufti as an instrument of British policy, despite his role in the intervening period in leading the rebellion in Palestine and collaborating with the Nazis. This expedience in British policy, sketchy though many of the details are, was a precedent for the subsequent

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> more extensive use of Islamists.

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> The first known direct contact between British officials and the Brotherhood came in 1941, at a time when British intelligence regarded the organisation’s mass following and sabotage plans against the British as ‘the

most serious danger to public security' in Egypt.74 That year al-Banna had been jailed by the Egyptian authorities acting under British pressure, but it was on his release later the same year that the British made contact with the Brotherhood. According to some accounts, British officials offered to aid the organisation, to 'purchase' its support. Theories abound as to whether al-Banna took up or rejected the offer of British support, but considering the relative quiet of the Brotherhood for some time after this period, it is possible that British aid was accepted.75 By 1942 Britain had definitely begun to finance

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the Brotherhood. On 18 May British embassy officials held a meeting with Egyptian Prime Minister Amin Osman Pacha, in which relations with the Muslim Brotherhood were discussed and a number of points were agreed. One was that 'subsidies from the Wafd [Party] to the Ikhwan el Muslimin [Muslim Brotherhood] would be discreetly paid by the [Egyptian] government and they would require some financial assistance in this matter from the [British] Embassy.' In addition, the Egyptian government 'would introduce reliable agents into the Ikhwan to keep a close watch on activities and would let us [the British embassy] have the information obtained from such agents. We, for our part, would keep the government in touch with information obtained from British sources.'76 It was also agreed that 'an effort would be made to create a schism in the party by exploiting any differences which might occur between Hassan al-Banna and Ahmed Sukkari,' the two leaders. The British would also hand over to the government a list of Brotherhood members they regarded as dangerous, but there would be no aggressive moves against the organisation. Rather, the strategy decided upon was that of 'killing by kindness'. Al-Banna would be allowed to start a newspaper and publish articles 'supporting democratic principles' – this would be a good way of, as one of the attendants put it, 'helping to disintegrate the Ikhwan'.77

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Partition also created a state that had little to bind it together other than an adherence to Islam, and which, under military rulers lacking any other domestic legitimacy, would later propagate extremist versions of Islam and nurture jihadist groups. Kashmir's division between India and Pakistan not only became a constant source of conflict between the two states; Pakistan's Islamist cause to 'liberate' Kashmir from part-Indian control would help advance the jihadist movement far beyond the sub-continent. Thus would Pakistan go on to become an epicentre of Islamic radicalism and, in the present, pose the largest terrorist threat to Britain. While these are complex processes, working over a long time-scale, they can be traced back to the very creation of Pakistan, in which British policy-makers, seeking to promote their own interests, played an important role. Perhaps ironically, clerics of the revivalist Deobandi movement, which would be patronised by Pakistan's later military rulers and would back jihadist forces in Pakistan, largely opposed the creation of Pakistan at the time, arguing that a Muslim national state was not needed to create their Islamic world.18 Narendra Sarila notes that 'the successful use of religion by the British to fulfil political and strategic objectives in India was replicated by the Americans in building up the Islamic jihadis in Afghanistan', to which we come in Chapter 8. Overall, 'many of the roots of Islamic terrorism sweeping the world today lie buried in the partition of India.'19

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British declassified files show that both the British and US governments considered installing Ayatollah Kashani as a client political leader in Iran following the coup. In March 1953 Foreign Office official Alan Rothnie wrote

> how Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had discussed with the head of the CIA, General Bedell Smith, the possibility of dealing with Kashani as an alternative to Musaddiq. Rothnie noted that ‘they would be glad to learn whether we have any information which would suggest that the United States and United Kingdom could find a modus vivendi [way of living] with Kashani once he was in power. They feel that Kashani might be bought, but are doubtful, once he was in power, whether he could be held to a reasonable line.’23

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> The evidence suggests that British and US support was provided to this ‘complete political reactionary’ both before and after the report noted above was written, in March 1953. Thus the episode shows how British policy-makers were prepared to work even with completely unreliable – indeed anti-British – forces to achieve immediate objectives against an even greater enemy (in this case, a democratically-elected government). This theme recurs throughout the postwar world, as Britain was later to connive with even more anti-Western forces.

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> In order to trigger a wider uprising, the CIA turned to the clergy and made contact with Kashani via the Rashidian brothers. Footing the bill for this joint Anglo–American operation, the US gave Kashani $10,000 to organise massive demonstrations in central Tehran, together with other ayatollahs who also brought their supporters out onto the streets.26 Amidst these demonstrations, the shah appointed General Zahidi as prime minister and appealed to the military to come out in support of him. Wider protests developed in which anti-shah activists were beaten up and pro-shah forces, including elements in the military, seized the radio station, army headquarters and Musaddiq’s home, forcing the latter to surrender to Zahidi and enabling the shah to return.27

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> The CIA also helped to mobilise militants of the Fadayan-e-Islam in these demonstrations; it is not known if Britain also did. The Fadayan’s principal founder and leader, Navab Safavi, is believed to have had associations at the time with Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shia cleric and scholar based at the shrine city of Qom. According to Iranian officials, Khomeini, then a follower of Kashani, was among the MI6/CIA-sponsored crowd protesting against Musaddiq in 1953.28 Fadayan-e-Islam’s members would act as foot soldiers of the Islamic revolution of 1979, helping to implement the wholesale introduction of Islamic law in Iran.29 After Musaddiq’s overthrow, the British received

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> her memoirs, written in exile in 1980, the shah’s twin sister, Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, who pressed her brother to assume power in 1953, observed that ‘many influential clergymen formed alliances with representatives of foreign powers, most often the British, and there was in fact a standing joke in Persia that if you picked up a clergyman’s beard, you would see the words “Made in England” stamped on the other side.’ Ashraf wrote that after the Second World War, ‘with the encouragement of the British, who saw the Mullahs as an effective counterforce to the communists, the elements of the extreme religious right were starting to surface again, after years of being suppressed.’33

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> The Preferred Plan, carried out in coordination with the Iraqi, Jordanian and Lebanese intelligence services, again aimed at stirring up the tribes on the Syria–Iraq border and also the Druze community in the south of the country, as well as utilising Syrian MI6 agents working inside the Baath Party. The plan read: 'CIA is prepared and SIS [Secret Intelligence Service or MI6] will attempt to mount minor sabotage and coup de main incidents within Syria, working through contacts with individuals.' Also, 'CIA and SIS should use their capabilities in both the psychological and action fields to augment tension' in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. The plan also incorporated another typical feature of British agitation: violent 'false flag' operations, blame for which would be pinned on official enemies, which had proved successful in removing Musaddiq from power in Iran. Thus staged frontier incidents and border clashes would provide a pretext for Iraqi and Jordanian military intervention. Syria had 'to be made to appear as the sponsor of plots, sabotage and violence directed against neighbouring governments.' This meant operations taking the form of 'sabotage, national conspiracies and various strong-arm activities' – to be blamed on Damascus.

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> The Anglo–American plan also involved Prime Minister Harold Macmillan authorising the assassination of key Syrian officials. 'A special effort should be made to eliminate certain key individuals', the plan read, continuing, 'Their removal should be accomplished early in the course of the uprising and intervention and in the light of circumstances existing at the time.' The head of Syrian military intelligence, the chief of the Syrian general staff and the leader of the Syrian Communist Party were all approved as targets.27 Yet in the end the 1957 plan never went ahead, mainly because Syria's Arab neighbours could not be persuaded to take action.

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> The plan was ditched in early October in favour of a strategy of 'containment plus', which involved enlisting pro-Western Arab states and exiled opposition groups to maintain pressure against Syria.28

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> July 1958 the British position in the Middle East took a more decisive blow when a popular revolution overthrew the monarchy in Iraq, which had ruled since its installation by the British in 1921. The revolution, from which Brigadier Abdul Karim Qasim emerged as leader, sent shockwaves through London and Washington, which feared that nationalist fervour would overthrow King Hussein and other pro-Western monarchies. In a joint operation, British forces were immediately dispatched to Jordan and US forces to Lebanon to offset the danger. Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd wrote that the British intervention in Jordan 'would serve the double purpose of stiffening the King's resolve and forming a bridgehead for such possible future action as may be necessary in Iraq', thus showing that an invasion of Iraq was also being considered.41 In fact, Britain also drew up plans for possible military intervention to shore up other pro-British governments in Kuwait, Libya and Sudan.42 King Hussein's call for British intervention in

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> Jordan provoked a critical response from the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, which organised anti-British demonstrations in Amman. In response, Hussein's regime arrested Brotherhood leader Abdal Rahman Khalifa (releasing him three months later) and continued to curb the organisation's political activities.43 The episode showed that, while the Brotherhood could be useful in providing support to reactionary pro-British regimes in times of crisis, as in 1957, it was a liability when it came to Western intervention in the region.

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> Significantly, the rebellion had an important Islamist element that was exploited and supported by Washington and London, as a radical insurgent group played a key role in the rebellion and the formation of the rebel government.50 One of the dissident colonels supported by the British and Americans was Ahmad Hussein, a regimental commander who had taken over government in West Sumatra in December 1956. Hussein chaired the counter-government deliberations and personally declared the rebel republic in February 1958; he was also recognised by the State Department as being close to the 'fanatical Darul Islam'.51 The Darul Islam (House of Islam) movement had been established by Muslim militias during the Japanese occupation in 1942 and was led by Sekarmadji Kartosuwirjo, a Muslim politician-turned-cleric. Since 1948, Darul Islam had held control over substantial areas of central West Java and had proclaimed an Islamic state there, recognising only sharia law, and setting itself up as an alternative to Sukarno's Indonesian republic. Other Darul Islam-associated rebellions against Sukarno's rule had broken out in the early 1950s, in provinces such as Aceh, South Sulawesi and South Kalimantan (Borneo). Darul Islam leaders had met in 1953 and formed a united front to proclaim the Islamic State of Indonesia, whose first imam was Kartosuwirjo.

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> Arriving in Indonesia in 1953, US Ambassador Hugh Cumming initially regarded the Darul Islam movement as 'a promising phenomenon'.53 At this time the US may have helped finance its central organisation; it certainly provided arms in the late 1950s to a kindred Islamic rebellion in Aceh province, led by the cleric Daud Beureuh. Beureuh announced that the parts of Aceh under his control now formed the Islamic Republic of Aceh, and that this was one of the ten component states in the federal structure of the new rebel republic proclaimed by the colonels.54 Unfortunately, the British files contain few details of the backing Whitehall gave to the Islamist forces at this time. By mid-1958, the Indonesian army had pushed

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> Darul Islam strongholds in the 1950s are now in many cases strongholds of jihadist support in Indonesia.60 Whether Anglo–American covert action in the 1950s contributed to the longer-term development of radical Islamist forces in Indonesia is hard to say. Certainly, Washington and London's collaboration with such forces highlights a familiar pattern: they were ready to work with reactionary, often extremist elements, with whom they had little in common other than an enemy, namely a secular, nationalist and independent government with some communist influence. The colonels and their allies in Darul Islam were seen as proxy forces, London's and Washington's shock troops, similar to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian ayatollahs. Used for their 'nuisance value', they were dropped when they had outlived their utility. Undermining the main enemy was a

short-term goal that, for a time at least, needed to be achieved at all costs, irrespective of the longer-term implications.

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Britain had long wanted to see the power of the PKI curbed and the fall of Sukarno's regime, as was evident in its covert backing of the dissident colonels in the late 1950s. From 1963, Britain was in open conflict with Indonesia after Jakarta announced a policy of 'confrontation' against Malaysia for the latter's British-backed plan to include the British colonies on the island of Borneo within the new Malaysian federation. As Indonesia deployed forces to conduct sabotage raids into Borneo, a jungle war ensued, involving thousands of British troops, together with warships, aircraft carriers and squadrons of aircraft. British officials described the Indonesian generals' campaign against the PKI as a 'necessary task' and understood that it involved 'ruthless terror' and a 'bloodbath', receiving regular reports on the mounting death toll. Britain secretly contacted the Indonesian military, promising them that Britain would not attack them in Borneo in order to leave them a free hand in Indonesia. The British also conducted propaganda operations to blacken the PKI in the eyes of the Indonesian people, planting international media stories falsely alleging that the Chinese were shipping arms to the PKI.56 Islamist groups, trained and equipped by the Indonesian army, played a critical role in the slaughter. Followers of the Masyumi party, the major Islamic force in Indonesia, took an active part in the killings of PKI members, as did remnants of Darul Islam, the extremist group that had been forced underground under Sukarno, which carried out massacres of suspected communists in West Java, Aceh and North Sumatra provinces.57 These forces benefited from US arms supplies – the US embassy in Thailand secretly procured weapons for the Indonesian military to arm Muslim and nationalist youths in central Java for use against the

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The Islamists were not so lucky: the new military rulers refused to implement sharia law and, although they did release Masyumi leaders imprisoned by Sukarno, they did not allow them to play political roles, and more generally sought to depoliticise Islam. At the same time, however, the Suharto regime had already seen how useful Islamists could be, and was keen to keep them on side. Analyst Martin van Bruinessen comments that Ali Murtopo, Suharto's intelligence chief and key architect of the new order's first decade, 'cultivated a group of Darul Islam veterans and allowed them to maintain a network of contacts as a secret weapon against "communism" and other enemies, that could be unleashed at any convenient moment.'59 Darul Islam members would go on to join the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and it would be from those militant groups that the terrorist threat in Indonesia would later emerge.60

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At the end of October Hussein received a visit from one Neil 'Billy' McLean, a British Army intelligence officer and sometime Conservative MP who acted as an unofficial member of the Foreign Office. McLean had extensive connections in the Middle East and pops up in many British covert operations in the postwar period, notably against Nasser in Egypt and Yemen. According to McLean, King Hussein told him that Nasser's death in September 1970 'had created a vacuum in the Middle East, and Jordan with British and American help could play a constructive part in bringing to power reasonable governments in both Iraq and Syria.'

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> But the British relationship to the 1970 Jordan crisis did not end there and took on another aspect entirely. Out of the Palestinian defeat emerged the Black September organisation, set up by members of the Fatah group in the PLO to take revenge on King Hussein's regime, and whose most notorious subsequent act was the kidnapping and killing of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. During the 1970s the British secret service, MI6, recruited as agents two arms traffickers supplying Black September terrorists with weapons. The main aim was to stop the supply of arms from Libya, which was backing Black September, to the IRA in Northern Ireland. The story provides an interesting new angle on Britain's willingness to work with terrorist groups to further short-term objectives in the Middle East. The episode centres on a certain Leslie Aspin, a former SAS soldier turned arms smuggler who in the late 1960s and early 1970s was trafficking weapons to a variety of terrorist organisations, including Black September. Aspin also ferried dozens of instructors to train recruits at Colonel Qadafi's 'Black September training school' at Hammadah al-Hamra in northwestern Libya.13 By 1970, MI6 already had an agent inside Black September, but also recruited Aspin, in February of that year, by offering him money and threatening to reveal to his contacts that he was already working for the British.14 Aspin later noted in his autobiography that he was recruited by MI6 because of his years spent as an arms smuggler in the Middle East and Europe, and that his handler told him that 'we are not in the least concerned with what you have been doing – apart from the fact that you can be of great assistance to us.'15 Given the codename 'Kovacks' by MI6, Aspin's involvement in arms trafficking continued after his recruitment. With British knowledge, he arranged at least four arms shipments from Libya to the IRA in 1970–72 and also helped to recruit IRA terrorists to be instructed in the Libyan camp. Aspin became a key source of information for MI6 and was able to tell it about Qadafi's European associates, the identities of Irish terrorists who had been to the Libyan camp and the names of other arms dealers in the Arab world.16 Aspin also recounts how in December 1973 he

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> informed his MI6 handler, codenamed Homer, that he had heard of plans by his Black September contacts to blow up a Pan Am or El Al aircraft at Rome airport before the end of the month. Homer, Aspin continued, promised to pass on this information to the three relevant governments (i.e., US, Israeli and Italian) but writes that 'I'm almost positive that he never did this'.17 It remains unclear why, but the most obvious explanation would be that the British did not want to reveal that they had agents inside Black September. On 17 December 1973 Palestinian terrorists blew up Pan Am Flight 110 on the tarmac at Rome's Fiumicino Airport, killing 29 people; this followed the deaths of two people in the terminal lounge as the terrorists began firing at passengers. They then hijacked a plane with more hostages and landed first at Athens, then at Damascus, where the hostages were released and from where the terrorists moved on to an unknown destination.

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> Another figure in the arms trafficking network was Monzer al-Kassar, who worked for the Syrians and was a close friend of Rifaat Assad, the brother of the Syrian president and chief of internal security. It is alleged that it was al-Kassar who, at Syrian instigation, recruited Aspin as an arms smuggler for the Libyans, and that he was also involved in procuring arms for the PLO as well as international drug smuggling. Al-Kassar was recruited by MI6 in March 1973, and continued the arms smuggling, but now under British auspices. He became a 'supersource' of intelligence and through him, 'the British could keep track of money moving to every terrorist

organisation in the world'.18 The MI6–al-Kassar story was to rumble on into the 1980s and 1990s, as we shall see. Britain's role in propping up King Hussein's regime in Jordan sits rather oddly with acquiescing in the supply of arms and training to a terrorist group bent on overthrowing him – even if this was apparently motivated by other factors (i.e., monitoring terrorist financing and arms deliveries to the IRA). This apparent incongruence seems less odd, however, in light of various other episodes where London has also backed both sides in conflicts, such as in the Hussein–Ibn Saud conflict in Arabia in the 1920s, the Arab–Israeli conflict in Palestine from 1920 until 1948, and others we will come to later.

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President, Sadat rejected Nasser's Arab nationalism, purged the government of Nasserites and expelled Soviet military advisers in 1972. Instead, Sadat's strategy was to Islamicise Egyptian society and forge a new alliance with the US. Washington was so keen to work with Sadat in bringing Egypt over to the US side in the Cold War that policy-makers and intelligence officers 'viewed his restoration of the Islamic right benignly or tacitly encouraged it'.20 In fact, Sadat's policies helped spark the emergence of global Islamic radicalism.

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Sadat's broad Islamisation of Egyptian society included enshrining Islam as the state religion in the 1971 constitution and reversing Nasser's policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood, releasing some Brothers from jail and declaring a general amnesty for all those imprisoned before May 1971. By the mid-70s Sadat, with the support of the Saudis, was also allowing Muslim Brothers to return from their Nasser-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia, where many of them had grown rich.22 At the same time, Sadat also established a covert relationship with Kamal Adham, the head of Saudi intelligence, representing a new Egyptian–Saudi détente and a sharp break from the bitter enmity under Nasser. The Muslim Brothers freed by Sadat gravitated towards Egypt's universities, many of which were by the early 1970s controlled by Islamist movements which had overturned the dominance of nationalist ideology. At the same time, the Islamist intelligentsia on the campuses began to spread their ideas throughout the Muslim world, courtesy of the networks and financial clout of the Saudi Wahhabis, especially following the 1973 Arab–Israeli conflict.23 Among the new recruits to the movement were two important social groups – the mass of young urban poor from deprived backgrounds and the devout bourgeoisie, a class hitherto excluded from political power and restricted

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by military and monarchical regimes. Sadat's secret services nurtured this radical Islamist resurgence by aiding the formation of various small militant groups in order to counter the remaining student groups led by Nasserites and Marxists.24 The Jamaat Islamiya (Islamic Associations) were formed on the university campuses with the help of a Sadat aide, the former lawyer, Mohammed Uthman Ismail, who is considered to be the 'godfather' of the Jamaat.25 By the late 1970s, the Jamaat, espousing the importance of a pure Islamic life and organising summer camps for its cadres, involving ideological training, had driven the leftist student organisations underground. The Jamaat remained close allies, and useful tools, of the Sadat government until 1977 when the president flew to Jerusalem for peace talks with Israel.26 In return for Sadat's opening to the Muslim

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> Sadat's belief that he could manage and co-opt the Muslim Brotherhood against his leftist and communist political opponents worked to an extent, but the Brotherhood refused to openly back the regime, not least since Sadat refused to allow it to operate as a political party.31 Sadat also failed to understand that only a complete Islamisation of society could satisfy the demands of the more fundamentalist groups.32 In the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War – when the Arab states led by Egypt made early territorial gains against the Israeli military before reaching a stalemate – Sadat deployed the symbols of Islam to fire Egypt, in contrast to Nasser's evocation of Arab nationalism in the 1967 war. But Sadat's overtures to Israel and the signing of the Camp David Accords in September 1978, which led to a peace treaty with Israel, confirmed to the radical Islamists, bent on Israel's destruction, that Sadat was clearly no ally. His earlier patronage of the militant Islamists had by now led to the formation of a violent jihadist movement in the country. Sadat realised the threat against the regime too late; it was only in 1981 that the regime cracked down on the Jamaat Islamiya, dissolving them in September.

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> Sadat's assassination was a blow to US and British strategy in the Middle East, but his Islamisation programme in Egypt was already proving useful to one major Anglo–American covert operation. It was the radicalised Islamist elements from Egypt who were among those volunteering to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan after 1979, and who played key leadership roles there, sponsored by the Sadat regime and aided by Saudi money. Thus these forces continued to be the 'handy weapon' recognised by British officials, though far beyond Egypt itself. But before turning to these later events, we consider the momentous events of 1973 and the deepening, and rather extraordinary British–Saudi alliance.

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> Flush with oil money, the Saudis stepped up their bankrolling of Islamic organisations and charities around the world.

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> During the 1970s the Saudi-controlled Muslim World League opened a raft of new offices abroad, while its Ministry for Religious Affairs printed and exported millions of Korans free of charge and distributed Wahhabi doctrinal texts among the world's mosques. The Saudis also instigated a massive building programme that would eventually construct 1,500 mosques worldwide.10 In Jeddah in 1972, the Saudis added to the international Islamic associations they had founded the previous decade by establishing the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), which sought to federate Islamist youth organisations throughout the world; WAMY would later be accused of being a discreet channel for Saudi donations to hardline organisations involved in supporting terrorist groups.11 At the same time, a quiet revolution was occurring in the British economy, involving the sealing of a profound economic alliance with the Saudis, the consequences of which are still evident. This was begun by Conservative ministers in the dying days of the Heath government, and enthusiastically continued by their Labour counterparts in the new Wilson government of 1974. British ministers bent over backwards to forge closer economic relations with Saudi Arabia by seeking to win contracts to

participate in its petrodollar-funded economic expansion; moreover, they went out of their way to offer up Britain as an attractive place to invest Saudi oil money. These British plans had actually begun before the

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When Healey met Saudi finance minister, Prince Musa'id, in December 1974, he told the latter that he did not consider the oil-producing countries to have acted immorally in raising oil prices, nor did he consider that the price increase was responsible 'by any means' for the difficulties now facing the world. The inflation that the world had experienced in 1973 had 'nothing to do with the price of oil', Healey said, adding that it was simply an 'historical accident' that the oil price increase had come just when the threat of inflation was being recognised.25 By January 1975, the Saudis had invested a

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massive $9.3 billion in Britain, of which $800 million was in the public sector – a total investment equivalent to around £20 billion today.26 British nationalised industries' total borrowing from the oil producers was around $1.4 billion. However, the Treasury noted that 'because of the sensitivities of the Saudis we have avoided identifying them as the source' of these loans to Britain. It also stated that the oil producers' surplus funds were making a major contribution to financing Britain's current account deficit in 1974 and the first half of 1975. The Saudis were now 'very substantial holders of sterling', the second largest holders among the oil producers (after Nigeria).27 When Harold Wilson met Prince Fahd in London in October 1975, he was briefed by his advisers to tell the future king: 'Your country now has a major stake in Britain and you will naturally be closely interested in the progress

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of the British economy.'28 Thus, within two years of the October 1973 oil crisis, the Saudis had poured huge quantities of petrodollars into the British economy, taking a sizeable stake in it. The upshot was that Britain was now economically reliant on the Saudi regime and would be in effect tied to aligning its foreign policy to the regime. British planners were perfectly comfortable with, indeed championed, the Saudis' increasingly influential regional and world role. In November 1974, a Foreign Office brief for Chancellor Healey's upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia noted the confidence with which Saudi Arabia, flush with petrodollars, was bestriding the world stage, and that it 'will retain for the foreseeable future a powerful voice in the formulation of Arab policies'. It encouraged Healey to raise the point that 'Saudi Arabia and Britain have many interests in common, not least in the maintenance of stability in the Arabian Peninsula'.29 'Stability' of course meant protecting the sub-region from infection by wayward notions of popular, republican or nationalist government. Britain welcomed Saudi Arabia's pre-eminence in the region, especially after having decided to reduce its own military commitments to the Gulf states a few years earlier.30 Both states were bent on maintaining in power

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the pro-Western feudal sheikhdoms elsewhere in Arabia. This applied firstly in Oman, where the sultan was still fighting nationalist forces in Dhofar province with the aid of British troops and Saudi money; and secondly in North Yemen, created after the British and Saudi-backed covert war and where a pro-Saudi military government

now faced a Soviet-backed nationalist regime in neighbouring South Yemen, Britain's former colony of Aden. British and Saudi officials were especially concerned with South Yemeni backing for the Dhofari rebels and connived throughout 1975 to find ways to counter it. In October that year, James Callaghan and Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud bin Faisal, jointly agreed that the Saudis would finance North Yemen's arms imports and that the British would arrange 'private' counter-insurgency training for the North Yemeni regime.31 Yet Britain did not only support Saudi foreign

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One senior Saudi with whom Britain also began developing relations was Prince Turki bin Abdul Aziz, an Oxford-educated vice minister of defence who, in 1977, succeeded Kamal Adham as head of the Saudi foreign intelligence service, the General Intelligence Directorate. Turki would reportedly forge close ties to MI6 and the CIA and even offer jobs to retired intelligence officers to be his eyes and ears in London or Washington.44 Soon after his appointment, in either 1978 or 1979, Turki is believed to have first met Osama Bin Laden, then a student at the University of Jeddah who had begun to associate with Islamic radicals. It is alleged that Turki suggested to Bin Laden that he use his money to aid the Afghan resistance against the Soviets following the latter's invasion in December 1979.45 While these developments were taking place, there was turmoil elsewhere in the Middle East.

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Britain's de facto support for the Iranian Islamists was, however, not merely passive and rhetorical. In 1982, when Khomeini's regime had stepped up its repression and executions of political opponents, Britain engaged in an extraordinary act of connivance with it, by helping it nearly destroy the communist Tudeh Party, the main leftist organisation in the country. After initially collaborating with the Islamic regime, Tudeh withdrew its support in 1982, criticising it for continuing the war with Iraq, which had begun in 1980. The regime then sought to suppress the Tudeh, imprisoning its leaders. When Vladimir Kuzichkin, a major in the Soviet KGB, defected to Britain in 1982, he passed on to MI6 a list of Soviet agents operating in Iran, following which MI6 allowed Kuzichkin to visit the CIA and also give it the list. In October, MI6 and the CIA jointly decided to pass this list to the Iranians, in order to curry favour with the Iranian regime and reduce Soviet influence in a strategically important country. Dozens of alleged agents were subsequently executed and more than a thousand members of the Tudeh arrested, while the party was banned. In December one hundred members of the party's military organisation were put on trial, drawing substantially on the information supplied by Britain; several were sentenced to death.75 The Tudeh was effectively crushed, though later managed to reconstitute itself and operate as an underground movement. This episode showed that Britain was prepared to secretly collaborate with a ruthless Shia Islamist regime in pursuit of specific common interests – the repression of the Left – even though Iran was by now considered a strategic threat and overall anti-Western force. This was also in line with long-standing British policy, reflecting British collaboration with Ayatollah Kashani in the coup planning against Musaddiq thirty years before. Soon, Britain even re-started the export of major weapons to the Khomeini regime, as we see in Chapter 9.

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Bin Laden's al-Qaida organisation was a direct product of the war, set up in 1988 out of the networks that were developing between the Afghans and the foreign fighters. Tony Blair's foreign secretary, Robin Cook, would

later say that the name al-Qaida (meaning ‘the base’) derived from ‘the database’ –‘the computer file of the thousands of mujahideen who were recruited and trained with help from the CIA’ – and, he forgot to say, MI6.78 Several of the Afghan camp networks built at this time with CIA, ISI or Saudi aid would be subsequently used by al-Qaida as bases for training and planning terrorist attacks, including Tora Bora, south of Jalalabad, which was constructed by one of Younis Khalis’ commanders. Al-Qaida would likely not have emerged to the extent that it did, had it not been for the infrastructure of the Afghan resistance built with US and British backing. Specific British contributions included specialised military training provided to various forces, covert military supplies and support for the larger US covert role in the war; Whitehall thus made a British contribution to the imminent emergence of global Islamist terrorism.

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this he was guided by the leading Pakistani religious leaders of the Deobandi Islamic revivalist movement, a school of thought with many similarities to the Wahhabi version of Islam in Saudi Arabia, and two important Islamist parties: the Jamaati-Islami (JI), Pakistan’s largest and most resourceful organisation which played a key role in recruiting for and funding the Afghan jihad; and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Assembly of Islamic Clergy or JUI), which insisted on a strict interpretation of Islamic law and which, along with the JI, ran an increasing network of madrassas throughout the country. By the time Zia was assassinated in 1988, 400,000 boys and young men, known as ‘taliban’, or students, were being educated in the Pakistani madrassas.3

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Zia’s domestic Islamisation drive, along with the money, arms and training pumped into the Afghan jihad, soon led to official Pakistani sponsorship of radical Islamist groups. While Britain and the US were supporting Zia throughout the decade, two major terrorist organisations were established in Pakistan with state complicity that would have important consequences for the region and the wider world.12 The first was the Harkat al-Jehad al-Islami (HUJI), set up early in the Afghan war, in 1980, by the JUI and the Tableeghi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary movement. Initially established to run relief camps for the mujahideen in Afghanistan, Pakistan’s intelligence service, the ISI, worked with the HUJI leadership to recruit and train militants from Pakistan to participate in the Afghan War.13 In the mid-1980s, the HUJI split, one faction establishing itself as the Harkat ul-Mujahideen (HUM), whose militants fought in Afghanistan and which recruited a further 5,000 volunteers from around the Muslim world to fight there. The initial batch of HUM volunteers was trained at camps in Afghanistan run by Jalaluddin Haqqani, of the Younis Khalis faction of the Hezb-e-Islami, which was also being covertly supported by Britain and the US. The HUM was regarded as having some of the best fighters in the jihad; the CIA provided it with Stinger missiles and trained HUM forces in their use.14 Under its leader, Fazlur Rehman Khalil, the HUM

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would go on to become one of Pakistan’s most violent terrorist organisations, being especially active against Indian forces in Kashmir. It would continue to run camps in Afghanistan throughout the 1990s and send militants to the jihad in Bosnia after 1992, all the while remaining a protégé of the ISI. The London bombers of 2005 would also have connections to the HUM.

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> Set up as a Sunni missionary organisation, the MDI appears to have received seed money from Bin Laden; so too did its military wing, Lashkare-Toiba (Army of the Pure or LET), whose creation was aided by the ISI and which recruited volunteers to join the Afghan jihad, setting up camps in eastern Afghanistan in 1987–8. The LET played a minimal role in the Afghan War, instead turning to fight in the Indian-administered part of Kashmir, for which it received ISI support.15 It has since become Pakistan's largest jihadist organisation and one of its most violent terrorist groups.16 The 7/7 bombers would also be linked closely to the LET.

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> Bahukutumbi Raman, a former Indian intelligence officer and leading expert on Pakistani terrorist groups, notes that 'the seeds of the radicalisation of the Pakistani diaspora in the UK were sown during the military dictatorship of Zia.'17 The general encouraged a number of Deobandi clerics from Pakistan to go to Britain as preachers in the mosques patronised by the Pakistani diaspora. There, they replaced the clerics of the Barelvi school of Islam, who tended to be more liberal and welcoming of Western-style democracy. Raman notes that in Britain today 'the influence of the more tolerant and not anti-Western Barelvi mullahs has been almost totally replaced by that of the more fundamentalist, anti-Western Deobandi –Wahhabi ones'.18 He also argues

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> The first signs of the radicalisation of the Pakistani diaspora in Britain came in February 1984. A group of British terrorists of Pakistani origin in the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) kidnapped an Indian diplomat posted to the Assistant High Commission in Birmingham, demanding the release of the JKLF's leader, who was in jail in Delhi convicted of murder. When the Indian government rejected the terrorists' demand, they killed the diplomat. Five years later, a better-known event revealed how some elements in the British Muslim community had become radicalised, when in January 1989 a group of Islamists in Bradford burnt copies of Salman Rushdie's novel, The Satanic Verses, and issued a fatwa calling for Rushdie to be killed. The protest was initially orchestrated from Pakistan and India by supporters of the Jamaat-i-Islami and by the UK Islamic Mission, which had been set up in the early 1960s to, as it stated, build a society 'based on the ideals, values and principles of Islam' and to introduce the sharia into British law.20 It also had – and maintains – strong links with Pakistan's JI. Deobandi and Barelvi associations also organised street protests in Britain and Pakistan against the novel. The Leicester Islamic Foundation – set up by the Islamic Mission in 1973 with JI officers, and still heavily influenced by the spiritual followers of the JI – called on Muslims to sign a petition to have the novel banned; this idea had been instigated by the Chennai chapter of the JI, which was pushing Indian politicians to stop the book being published in India.21 The anti-Rushdie protests were supported by only a small minority of British Muslims but sadly placed the broader British Muslim community under a harsh media spotlight. It took a long time for that community to recover; no sooner had it done so than first 9/11 and then the 7/7 bombings dealt it even more severe blows. The radicalisation of elements in the Muslim community in the 1980s was already a case of 'blowback', given Britain's conniving with a Pakistani regime sponsoring Islamist and terrorist groups. The Rushdie affair should have been a wake-up call to British foreign and domestic policy-makers – yet their response in the early 1990s was the opposite: to deepen still further British complicity in Pakistan's promotion of radical Islam.22

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> true, it is hard to believe that these deals were anything other than a means to enrich the Saudi buyers, since Riyadh has little possible use for the equipment, being entirely dependent on the US military in a crisis. These deals also meant that Britain was now even more beholden to the good will of the Saudi regime. In a 1987 interview, Margaret Thatcher stressed the 'excellent' relations between the two countries: the already minimal likelihood of Whitehall seriously distancing itself from the Saudis on any major issue now appeared to be ended.

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> The 1980s witnessed the unprecedented growth of the radical Islamist movement, thanks principally to the Afghan War, the Islamisation programme of Pakistan's General Zia, Saudi funding to Islamist causes around the world and Iranian sponsorship of a variety of Islamist groups – to all of which developments British policy had contributed in different ways. Gilles Kepel has noted that 1989 marks Islamism's peak of intensity as a political force. In that year Algeria's radical Islamist political party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), was formed, becoming a fast-growing political force that soon captured half the votes in local and national elections, before a military coup prevented its taking political power. During the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories, which had broken out in 1987, the hegemony of the secular PLO was for the first time challenged by a new Islamist force, the Islamist Resistance Movement, or Hamas.67 Both the FIS and Hamas, among other Islamist movements, had a measure of popular support, having become the main political alternative to what were seen as failed secular nationalist movements.

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> During the war, the US encouraged the Shias of southern Iraq to rise in revolt against Saddam, but once this duly began in March 1991 Washington allowed Iraqi forces to regroup and brutally crush the revolt, slaughtering thousands. US aircraft flew above Iraqi helicopters, in effect giving them protection while, at one point in the uprising, US troops stopped the Shia rebels from reaching an arms depot to obtain ammunition.8 Washington preferred to keep Saddam in power than unleash forces that might be allied to its enemy, the Islamic Republic of Iran. So too with Britain, which had also initially encouraged the rebels; MI6, along with the CIA, had helped set up the Free Iraq radio station, which broadcast Anglo–American propaganda throughout the country. One British intelligence official, when asked about the earlier appeals for revolt, replied: 'We hadn't thought it through properly.'9 This was nonsense: both London and Washington's urging of the Shias to revolt was classic policy – using Islamic forces to achieve specific short-term objectives, in this case to destabilise Saddam's regime and pave the way for Iraq's ouster from Kuwait. Once this objective had been achieved, these forces became expendable, by now a very familiar pattern in Anglo–American connivance with Islamic forces in the region.

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> While backing the Saudi royals, however, Britain also provided a hospitable base for those who had by now become their nemesis. In July 1994, Osama Bin Laden established an office in London, called the Advice and Reformation Committee (ARC), which sought to promote worldwide opposition to the Saudi regime – an immediate response to the Saudis revoking his citizenship, according to a declassified CIA report.25 Run from a

house in Wembley, north London, the ARC was equipped with a bank of fax machines and computers which churned out dozens of pamphlets and communiqués lambasting the lavishness of the House of Saud and its waywardness from promoting sharia law in the country, as well as calling for a break-up of the Saudi state. According to recent US court documents, the ARC was 'designed both to publicise Bin Laden's statements and to provide cover for activity in support for Al Qaeda's "military" activities, including the recruitment of trainees, the disbursement of funds and the procurement of equipment and services.' In addition, the London office served as a communication centre for reports on military, security and other matters from various al-Qaida cells to its leadership.26

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A US Congressional research service report, released just after the September 11th attacks in 2001, noted that Bin Laden even visited London in 1994 and stayed for a few months in Wembley to form the ARC.27 Other sources claim that he visited London in 1994 to meet members of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), and even that he travelled regularly to London in 1995 and 1996 on his private jet.28 Whatever the truth of these claims, Bin Laden's telephone billing records from 1996–8 show that nearly a fifth of his calls, 238 out of 1,100 – the largest single number – were made to London, showing the importance of this base.29 It was the ARC that arranged a meeting between Bin Laden and a number of CNN journalists in March 1997.30 The ARC's staff included two members of Ayman

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Zawahiri's terrorist organisation, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), Adel Abdel Bary and Ibrahim Eidarous, both of whom were later indicted in the US for involvement in the 1998 embassy bombings, when simultaneous explosions in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam killed over 200 people. Abdel Bary is alleged by the US to have managed al-Qaida training camps and guest houses before arriving in Britain, where he was granted asylum in 1993; two years later he was sentenced to death in absentia for his alleged involvement in the bombing of the Khan al-Khalili tourist landmark in Cairo. In May 1996 Abdel Bary is accused of being appointed by al-Zawahiri as leader of the London cell of the EIJ.31 Eidarous is alleged to have begun organising the EIJ's cell in Azerbaijan in August 1995 before coming to London in September 1997 to become the leader of its London base.32 While in Britain, where he was also granted political asylum, Eidarous is accused of maintaining satellite phone links with the al-Qaida leadership, and, with Abdel Bary, of providing forged passports for EIJ operatives in the Netherlands and Albania.33 On the day of the East Africa bombings, both disseminated the claims of responsibility through faxes to the media; lawyers for the two men deny that they had advance knowledge of the bombings but an MI5 officer, later giving evidence to an immigration appeal, stated that the faxes were actually sent before the bombings took place.34 The two men were detained by the Special Branch in September 1998 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, on charges that they were associated with the 1998 bombings.35 The head of Bin Laden's ARC was the Saudi dissident

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The London base allowed Bin Laden to motivate his supporters around the world. The perpetrators of the 1995 bomb attacks in Saudi Arabia had read Bin Laden's writings after being faxed them from London.50 It was also from London that various of Bin Laden's key fatwas were sent around the world. The ARC, for example,

disseminated the English translation of Bin Laden's August 1996 declaration of jihad against the Americans 'occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places', calling for the US to be driven from Saudi Arabia, the overthrow of the House of Saud and Islamic revolution all over the world.51 Two years later, in February 1998, the ARC publicised Bin Laden's creation of an 'International Front for Jihad against the Crusaders and the Jews', joining together a variety of terrorist groups. However, 'this caused little stir in Whitehall', Times journalists Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory note.52 Also instructive is that the British and US intelligence

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services repeatedly turned down the chance to acquire information on Bin Laden and al-Qaida in the 1990s. In early 1995, for example, the Sudanese government, then hosting Bin Laden, offered to extradite or interview him and other key operatives who had been arrested on charges of planning terrorist atrocities. The Sudanese proferred photographs and details on various Arab–Afghans, including Saudis, Yemenis and Egyptians who had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets. 'We know them in detail,' said one Sudanese source. 'We know their leaders, how they implement their policies, how they plan for the future. We have tried to feed this information to American and British intelligence so they can learn how things can be tackled.' This Sudanese offer was rejected, reportedly due to the 'irrational hatred' the US felt for the Sudanese regime, as was a similar subsequent offer made specifically to MI6.53 Three years later, Britain was also to ignore an arrest warrant for Bin Laden issued by Libya, as we see in Chapter

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So safe did Bin Laden's supporters feel in London that, in 1995, they sent overtures to the Home Office enquiring whether their leader could claim political asylum. The then home secretary, Michael Howard, later said that an investigation by his staff into Bin Laden resulted in a banning order being placed on him.54 In January 1996, the Home Office sent a letter to Bin Laden stating that he be 'excluded from the United Kingdom on the grounds that your presence here would not be conducive to the public good.'55 Presumably, giving asylum to Bin Laden would have been a step too far for the British in view of their need to be seen to be placating the Saudis.

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The first Taliban were mainly students of the Pakistani madrassas, notably those run by the JUI.54 General Pervez Musharraf later wrote in his autobiography that 'the Taliban were not a new, post-Soviet phenomenon. They were taught by the same teachers in the same seminaries that had produced the mujahideen.' He added that 'we had hoped that the Taliban, driven by religious zeal based on the true principles of Islam, would bring unity and peace to a devastated country.'55 This was nonsense: the Taliban were the most extreme militants, consciously forged by Pakistan simply as its proxy force in Afghanistan. Thousands of students of the Pakistani madrassas crossed into Afghanistan in 1995 and 1996, advised and armed by the Pakistani army as they gradually took control of Afghanistan's urban centres.56 The fighters included cadres of various Pakistani terrorist groups such as the LET and the HUA, also encouraged by the ISI. The US embassy in Islamabad wrote that the HUA was operating camps in Afghanistan under the direction of the ISI.57 The Saudis played their customary role of bankrollers of the enterprise, and are believed to have transferred hundreds of millions of dollars in direct payments and oil price subsidies to Pakistan's military during the mid-1990s, helping the ISI build up its proxy forces in both Afghanistan and Kashmir.58

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> According to Bosnian Muslim military intelligence sources, Britain was also one of the main channels through which foreign jihadists entered Bosnia, while London hosted several financers and recruiters for the cause.29 Moreover, it appears that Britain, along with the US, actively encouraged foreign jihadists to go to Bosnia. Washington's secret alliance with Iran and the Bosnian Muslims meant that it allowed mujahideen fighters to be flown in; Richard Holbrooke, the US's chief peace negotiator in the Balkans, later noted that the Bosnian Muslims 'wouldn't have survived' without this help and called it a 'pact with the devil'.30 Furthermore, former Indian intelligence officer B. Raman has noted that 'according to reliable estimates, about 200 Muslims of Pakistani origin living in the UK went to Pakistan, got trained in the camps of the HUA [Harkat ul-Ansar, the Pakistani terrorist group] and joined the HUA's contingent in Bosnia with the full knowledge and complicity of the British and American intelligence agencies.'31 Raman notes that 'the CIA asked the ISI to divert part of the dregs' of the HUA to assist the Muslims, and that the first group of militants entered Bosnia in 1992.32 The contingent was organised by the ISI, funded by Saudi intelligence and armed by Iranian intelligence, while leadership and motivation were provided by serving and retired officers of the ISI and Turkish intelligence.33 By this time the Arabs of Afghan vintage had

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> already started creating mayhem around the world and so these intelligence agencies wanted to avoid the use of Arabs; for this reason, 'they turned to Pakistanis, particularly Pakistanis living in the UK and other countries of West Europe. Thus began the radicalisation of the Muslim youth of Pakistani origin living in West Europe.'34 In late 1994 there were also reports that militants arriving from overseas were being accompanied into Bosnia by US special forces equipped with high-tech communications equipment and were intending to establish a command, control, communications and intelligence network to coordinate Bosnian Muslim offensives.35

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> Most importantly, a new generation of jihadists had received military training and combat experience to take back to their home countries, notably terrorists of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) who proceeded to conduct numerous unspeakable atrocities in a brutal civil war. After Bosnia, many mujahideen veterans showed up in leadership positions in jihadist groups from the US to Europe, North Africa to the Middle East, Chechnya to Kashmir. US journalist Evan Kohlmann notes that the deployment of Islamist militants in Bosnia occurred at an early stage of the al-Qaida movement, and that the experience had long-lasting effects on the group: the Bosnian jihad enabled militant cells from different countries to connect and draw together in a new continent – Europe. Bosnia's geographical position meant it was a good jumping-off point for the expansion of terrorism into Britain, Italy, France and Germany.52 It was the metro bombings in Paris in July 1995, towards the end of the Bosnian War, which marked the beginning of Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe. In addition, there were now 'numerous Islamist

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> Yet Britain was not the only ally of the Turks in crushing the Kurds. It was once again fighting the same cause of countering nationalism as the jihadists – by now a familiar combination. Starting in the winter of 1995, a few

> hundred jihadist veterans from the war in Bosnia – known as ‘Balkans’ – were transported to Turkey by the Turkish intelligence service, MIT, and the Refah (Welfare) Party, the country’s main Islamist party. According to US terrorism expert Yossef Bodansky, they were then taken for advanced training at a base in northern Cyprus and subsequently deployed to eastern Turkey for action against the Kurds, as well as to Chechnya, Kashmir and Afghanistan.58 Several western European governments expressed concern about Turkey’s use of the ‘Balkans’ in 1996. ‘In response, the Turks replied that Ankara would not have done any of this without the blessing of, and support from, the Clinton administration,’ Bodansky notes, adding: ‘if that is the case, and the Clinton administration even tacitly endorsed the Turkish “recycling” of the “Balkans”, then this is even worse than the US record in Afghanistan’ – since by now it was perfectly clear that jihadist forces had turned to terrorism, including against the US.59 By this time, the Turkish state was also actively

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> using the Turkish Hezbollah organisation to help counter the PKK. Set up in 1983, Turkish Hezbollah was a Kurdish organisation inspired by the Iranian revolution and the writings of Said Hawwa, a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, and aimed to establish an Islamic state in southeast Turkey, but had no formal links to the Lebanese Hezbollah. Its southeastern group emerged in 1991 under the leadership of Huseyin Velioglu, an Ankara University graduate.60 Hezbollah proceeded to conduct numerous brutal murders of PKK sympathisers in the cities of the southeast, killing more than a thousand people between 1992 and 1995. In 1993 local officials in the southeast claimed that the Turkish military had provided training for Hezbollah, and this was confirmed in an April 1995 report of the Commission on Unsolved Murders of the Turkish Parliament, which revealed that in 1993 a Hezbollah training camp had been operating with military assistance.61 A government minister in the early 1990s, Fikri Saglar, has said that the ‘high command of the Armed Forces’ was ‘the founder, promoter and indeed user of Hizbullah [sic] in the southeast’ and that ‘Hizbullah was expanded and strengthened on the basis of a decision at the National Security Council in 1985, and some of them were even trained at security force headquarters.’62 These were the very forces, of course, to whom Britain was providing arms and otherwise backing.

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> The plot went ahead in February 1996 in Sirte, Qadafi’s home city, but a bomb was detonated under the wrong car. Six innocent bystanders were killed, and Qadafi escaped unscathed. Shayler recollected how: At a meeting shortly after, [David Watson] ventured to me in a note of triumph that Tunworth had been responsible for the attack. ‘Yes, that was our man. We did it,’ was how he put it. He regarded it, curiously, as a triumph even though the objective of the operation had not been met and reporting indicated that there had been civilian casualties. Despite that, I very much got the impression that this was regarded as a coup for MI6 because it was playing up the reputation that the real James Bonds wanted to have.13 Annie Machon, Shayler’s partner and a former MI5 officer, writes that, by the time MI6 paid over the money to Tunworth, Osama Bin Laden’s organisation was already known to be responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and MI5 had set up G9C, ‘a section dedicated to the task of defeating Bin Laden and his affiliates’.14 This is significant in light of Britain’s toleration of Bin Laden’s London base – the Advice and Reformation Committee – which would not be closed down for another two and half years.

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> The episode is interesting in that it shows how Britain's secret collusion with radical Islamists has directly undermined its ability to curb and prosecute them – a leitmotif, in fact, of Britain's postwar foreign policy where Whitehall has often collaborated with the very groups to which it claims to be opposed. Indeed, the extent of this collaboration has been so extensive that many open public trials of the leading terrorist figures are likely to expose it, a fact which also applies to the Saudi, Pakistani and US governments. This partly explains London's and Washington's overt opposition to pursuing open legal processes for terrorist suspects – and, most notably, Camp Delta at Guantanamo Bay, where suspected militants have been incarcerated and interrogated behind closed doors.

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> Much later, in October 2006, then Chancellor Gordon Brown said in a speech on 'meeting the terrorist challenge' to an audience at Chatham House: 'The threat from al-Qaida did not begin on September 11th – indeed the attacks on the twin towers were being planned as the United States was taking action with Europe to protect Muslims in the former Yugoslavia.'2 Brown was right; in fact, the British were providing military training to forces working with the very people planning the 9/11 attacks.

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> Moreover, the KLA had also developed connections to al-Qaida. Bin Laden reportedly visited Albania and established an operation there in 1994.10 In the years preceding the NATO bombing campaign, more al-Qaida militants moved into Kosovo to support the KLA, financed by sources in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. By late 1998, the head of Albanian intelligence was saying that Bin Laden had sent units to fight in Kosovo while the media noted CIA and Albanian intelligence reports citing 'mujahideen units from at least half a dozen Middle East countries streaming across the border into Kosovo from safe bases in Albania'.11 US intelligence reports were also noting that al-Qaida was sending funds and militants to join the KLA, while numerous KLA fighters had trained in al-Qaida camps in Afghanistan and Albania. One of the 'links' between Bin Laden and the KLA identified by US intelligence was 'a common staging area in Tropoje, Albania, a centre for Islamic terrorists.' The KLA was helping hundreds of foreign fighters to cross from Albania into Kosovo, including 'veterans of the militant group Islamic Jihad from Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan', carrying forged passports.12 One KLA unit was led by the brother of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden's right-hand man, according to a senior Interpol official later giving evidence to the US Congress.13 One Western military official was quoted as saying that the Islamist militants 'were mercenaries who were not running the show in Kosovo, but were used by the KLA to do their dirty work.'14 Asked in parliament in November 1998 about a

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> Tony Lloyd, told the House of Commons that the government was aware of media reports of contacts between Islamic terrorist groups and the KLA but 'we have no evidence of systematic involvement'; the use of the word 'systematic' was likely instructive, implying that the government did indeed have some knowledge.17

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> At an international meeting in Khartoum in April 1995, Bodansky notes that Islamist groups and sponsoring governments, led by Sudan and Iran, agreed to set up two new centres in Tehran and Karachi, the latter intended to escalate a terrorist campaign in Kosovo. In the autumn of 1995, just as the war in Bosnia was coming to a close amidst continued NATO bombing, the Bosnian government began to deploy experienced mujahideen to Albania. By early the following year, violence had erupted in Kosovo, perpetrated by the KLA, as we have seen, which was seized on by the Clinton administration 'as an excuse for a marked increase in US intervention in Kosovo on behalf of "oppressed Albanians"', Bodansky comments, three years before the actual NATO bombing campaign.19

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> At some point in 1996 British intelligence, along with the US and Swiss services, made its first known contact with a senior KLA official in Albania, likely to have been Shaban Shala, a commander who would not only fight in Kosovo in 1999 but also inside Serbia in 2000.20 Formal contacts between the KLA and the US took place in July 1998 when Chris Hill, the US special envoy for Kosovo, met KLA officials; the following day a British diplomat also met KLA officials in their headquarters in the central Kosovan village of Klecka.21 The British government later claimed that 'an initial meeting' between an official in the British embassy in Belgrade and KLA leaders was held on 30 July 1998.22 If so, this came two days after Baroness Symons recognised in an answer to a parliamentary question that the KLA was a 'terrorist' organisation and that 'it was clear' that it had 'procured significant quantities of arms in Albania'.23 By October, Robin Cook was making clear that Britain was opposed to the KLA's political objective of forging a greater Albania: 'There is no place on the international map for a greater Albania – any more than there is for a greater Serbia or a greater Croatia.'

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> few weeks into the bombing campaign, the Sunday Telegraph reported that KLA fighters were receiving SAS training at two camps near the Albanian capital Tirana, and at another near the Kosovan border, most likely near the town of Bajram Curri.26 This was the centre of the KLA's military operations, where a series of training camps were dotted in the hills and from where arms were collected and distributed.27 Crucially, it was also where jihadist fighters had their 'centre' and common staging area with the KLA, as noted by the previous US intelligence reports. The British training involved instructing KLA officers in guerrilla tactics and weapons handling, demolition and ambush techniques, as well as conducting intelligence-gathering operations on Serbian positions.28 The whole covert operation was funded by the CIA while the German secret service, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), provided weapons and training.29 The BND had been providing covert support and training to the KLA since the mid-1990s.30 British ministers consistently denied any knowledge

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> NLA forces were now being called 'terrorists' by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and 'murderous thugs' by NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson, just as they had been before the March 1999 bombing campaign, when, as the KLA, the British were cooperating with them.53 The NLA's ambushes and assassinations in Macedonia were little different from those perpetrated as the KLA. It also, initially at least, continued to be

covertly supported by the US, which in one operation evacuated 400 NLA fighters when they became surrounded by Macedonian forces, and whose arms supplies helped the guerillas take control of nearly a third of Macedonia's territory by August 2001; it was only after this that Washington, under pressure from its NATO allies, started to rein in its proxy force and throw its weight behind peace talks.54 The following month, al-Qaida struck New York and Washington.

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Pakistan's role in 9/11 also raises a British connection. After 9/11, the Times of India reported that Lieutenant General Mahmood Ahmad, the director of the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, and a strong supporter of the Taliban, had ordered the wiring of $100,000 to the leader of the 9/11 terrorist group, Mohammed Atta. Ahmad's contact in sending the funds was said to be Omar Saeed Sheikh, the Briton of Pakistani origin who had developed links to the HUA terrorist group and whom Musharraf later accused of being an MI6 agent.7 Subsequently, various media reported that the

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FBI and Western intelligence sources believed that Sheikh had indeed transferred the money to Atta and that the FBI had tracked more than $100,000 from banks in Pakistan to two banks in Florida, where accounts were held by Atta, though it did not mention the ISI.8 Ahmad stepped down as ISI chief less than a month after 9/11, some reports suggesting that this was due to the FBI's uncovering of credible links between him and Sheikh in the wake of 9/11.9 Sheikh is reported to have told the then Pakistani army corps commander in Peshawar and later Director of the ISI, General Ehsanul Haq, that he had learned of plans for terrorist strikes in the US on a visit to Afghanistan before 9/11.10 Furthermore, Sheikh later said he was an ISI agent who had been operating from Lahore since his release from prison in 1999; US police and intelligence officials have also said that Sheikh has been a 'protected asset' of the ISI.11 There are suspicions that Sheikh had been recruited by the ISI as long ago as 1992 while he was a student in London.12 In this light, it is barely credible that the ISI did not have foreknowledge of 9/11. Omar Saeed Sheikh is the most intriguing possible

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The consequences of British policy were profound, given Sheikh's involvement in a variety of further acts of terrorism. He is reported to have soon visited Afghanistan, where he devised a secure, web-based communications system for al-Qaida, served as a guerilla warfare instructor at training camps and met Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, as well as Bin Laden.18 Then in August 2001, in a turnaround from the Foreign Office statement eighteen months earlier, British intelligence was reported to be asking their Indian counterparts to apprehend Sheikh for questioning.19 Whether Sheikh had broken his deal with the British or whether they had simply become concerned about his activities remains unclear. It is also instructive that the British turned to India for information on Sheikh and not Pakistan, giving further credence to the view that the Pakistanis were protecting him. At this point, Sheikh is alleged to have wired the money to the 9/11 group and, a few days after 9/11, to have travelled to Afghanistan to meet Bin Laden.20 He also later claimed to have known the militants who bombed the Srinagar state assembly in Kashmir in October 2001, killing 38 people, and those who stormed the Indian parliament in Delhi in December.21 Most prominently, in 2002, Sheikh was found guilty in Pakistan of orchestrating the gruesome beheading of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter, in Karachi, a murder

sometimes explained by Pearl's possible uncovering of links between the Pakistani intelligence establishment and al-Qaida.22 Sheikh surrendered to a former official of the ISI in early 2002, and after his trial was sentenced to death, but remains alive in a Pakistani jail from where he has also been accused of masterminding the July 2005 bombings in London. Whether Sheikh had been working for the British or not, there is strong evidence that, even after 9/11, he was an ISI agent as well as an activist for al-Qaida, and may have acted as an intermediary between the two.23 Several media reports suggest that Sheikh knows too much about this ISI connection ever to be allowed to leave Pakistan. General Musharraf turned down US requests to extradite him and was reported to have told the then US ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlain, that 'I would rather hang Sheikh myself than have him extradited'.24 The possibility that a British citizen played a

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role in 9/11 might be expected to strongly interest Whitehall; the 9/11 attacks, which killed sixty-seven Britons, were 'the worst terrorist attack on British citizens in my country's history', Tony Blair kept repeating.25 Yet there is no evidence that the British authorities have sought to investigate Sheikh's alleged links to 9/11 or have his story publicised. The government shows as much interest in exposing Sheikh's past as Islamabad, perhaps for what he might reveal about his connection to the security services. All this has occurred alongside Whitehall's general sweeping under the carpet of the possible Pakistani and Saudi roles in 9/11. It was becoming clear that there was one other major capital city that those serious about tackling global terrorism needed to investigate further, somewhat closer to home.

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As we saw in Chapter 12, the Egyptian-born Hamza had founded the organisation, the Supporters of Shariah, in 1994, and in 1995 made three trips to the war in Bosnia, ostensibly as an aid worker but also, he claims, as an adviser to Algerian fighters there.28 The same year, the Egyptian government requested Hamza's extradition to face terrorism charges, on suspicion of his involvement with Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Algerian GIA; Whitehall rejected this, along with another extradition request made in 1999, this time from

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Yemen, for reasons which remain unclear.29 Evidence in the public domain suggests that in early 1997 Special Branch began talking to Hamza, when he was the preacher at the mosque in Luton, to act as an informant on other jihadists, and he was ascribed a codename: Damson Berry. Unknown to the police, MI5 also began meeting Hamza at the behest of French intelligence, which was seeking information on GIA activists; Hamza is said to have recruited and coordinated fundraising for the GIA, as well as publishing their newsletter, which was edited by the cleric Abu Qatada.30 MI5 held seven meetings with Hamza between 1997 and 2000. Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory note in their book on Hamza that he had 'a friendly relationship' with MI5 and Special Branch in the late 1990s: 'They called him regularly, invited him for meetings and were generally on cordial terms.' This eventually exasperated French officials investigating terror cases in which Hamza was believed to be involved, since 'to French eyes, the British were protecting Abu Hamza and many more dangerous men in the mosque', O'Neill and McGrory write. They also conclude that the information passed on by Hamza to MI5 was limited to the odd name or general information on other Islamist groups, and that his cooperation with the security services was a sham.31

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> services.There is also the case of apparent British protection of Abu Qatada, who has become known as ‘al-Qaida’s spiritual leader in Europe’ and was described by the judge reviewing his immigration status in 2004 as a ‘truly dangerous individual … at the centre in the United Kingdom of terrorist activities associated with al-Qaida’.44 Yet it has been reported that Qatada was ‘a double agent working for MI5’ and that Britain ignored warnings before 9/11 from half a dozen friendly governments about Qatada’s links with terrorist groups, refusing to arrest him. Instead, it has been said that the intelligence services were intending ‘to use the cleric as a key informer against Islamic militants in Britain.’ Many militants are said to have visited him, including the shoe bomber Richard Reid.45 Qatada had been in Afghanistan in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where it is claimed that he had known Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who later became al-Qaida’s leader in Iraq.46 Qatada came to Britain in 1993 on a forged United Arab Emirates passport, claimed asylum and in 1994 gained indefinite leave to remain in Britain until June 1998.47 During this period, it is alleged that he agitated and recruited for, among others, Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Algerian GIA, and had contacts with Abu Doha, an Algerian extremist whose followers later plotted to bomb Strasbourg Market.48 Qatada has denied claims that he was al-Qaida’s European ambassador and insists he never met Bin Laden.49

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> The judge considering Qatada’s immigration status concluded that during this time, 1996–97, ‘he may well have regarded the United Kingdom as a safe haven and believed that it was far more useful to be able to operate here.’54 While Qatada appeared to pose as being able

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> Qatada was finally ‘found’ in October 2002, after releasing a 10-page document justifying the 9/11 attacks. He was detained by the British authorities a few days later on suspicion of undertaking ‘a range of support activities, including fundraising, on behalf of various international terrorist organisations’ and of making ‘public statements of support for the violent activities of these groups’.65 Qatada was subsequently held without charge in Belmarsh high security prison until being released, subject to a control order, in March 2005, when the Law Lords struck down an emergency anti-terror law that allowed his indefinite detention without trial.66 However, the authorities detained him again five months later, soon after Britain signed an extradition agreement with Jordan; but Qatada was again released from prison in June 2008, subject to strict bail conditions and a 22-hour curfew, after the High Court upheld his appeal against deportation to Jordan, on the grounds that he was likely to face a terrorism trial based on evidence from witnesses who had been tortured.67 In February 2009, however, the Law Lords ruled that Qatada could be deported to Jordan, since when he has been fighting extradition from prison in Britain. MI5 recruited other people close to Qatada, such as Bisher al-Rawi, who was contacted soon after the

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> It remains unclear whether Bakri was collaborating with the security services after the end of the Kosovo War in June 1999; his interviews noted earlier in this chapter suggest he believed he had ‘public immunity’ until at least mid-1999. The possibility of his collusion with the authorities was apparently picked up by some in the jihadist

community. In November 2001, for example, the London-based Azzam publications, known for its support of Bin Laden, posted a notice appearing to warn jihadists away from Bakri and al-Muhajiroun, saying: 'As part of a plan to reinforce the "sincerity" of the leader [Bakri] of this organisation [al-Muhajiroun] in the eyes of British Muslims, we expect the British authorities to arrest him in the near future, but for him to be subsequently released.'76 Bakri was indeed questioned many times by the police or security services –'on at least sixteen occasions', he said himself – but always escaped arrest.77 Most intriguingly, after the 2005 London bombings, Bakri was not even interrogated by the security services as a possible suspect; instead he was allowed to leave the country. A month after 7/7, Bakri voluntarily left Britain for Lebanon, and a year later, in July 2006, the home secretary, Charles Clarke, announced that Bakri would not be permitted to return to Britain since 'his presence is not conducive to the public good'.78 These decisions raise further suspicions about Whitehall's relationship with Bakri, given the jihadist activities he had been involved in, and also the well-publicised connections between the 7/7 bombers, and other would-be British bombers, and the al-Muhajiroun organisation.

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The trail of the 7/7 bombers clearly goes back to Pakistan. Khan was trained in northern Pakistan in July 2003, learning how to fire assault rifles at a camp reportedly set up soon after Britain invaded Iraq.37 Three of the four 7/7 bombers – Khan, along with Shehzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain – visited Pakistan between November 2004 and January 2005, while two of them, Khan and Tanweer, visited madrassas in Lahore and Faisalabad where they learned how to make explosives.38 The 7/7 group may also have received 'advice or direction' from individuals in Pakistan between April and July 2005, and it was shortly after their return from Pakistan in February 2005 that they began planning the attacks, according to official reports on the London bombings.39 Muktar Said Ibrahim, the ringleader of the 21 July 2005 bombing plot – the failed attempt by five British Islamists to attack London's transport system – had been in Pakistan at a similar time as Khan and Tanweer, between December 2004 and March 2005, and had also attended a training camp there.40 Moreover, it is possible that the 7/7 bombers and

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other would-be British terrorists were trained by the ISI. For example, Omar Khyam, a twenty-five-year old from Surrey, was the leader of a group of five men found guilty in April 2007 of a plot in Britain to explode bombs made of fertilizer. In 2000, he trained at a camp near Muzaffarabad – the capital of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir – where, he said, he saw the ISI instructing recruits in handling explosives. Khyam's family had a history of serving in the Pakistani military and the ISI and it was by 'using military connections' that he was found in Pakistan and brought back to Britain.41 Similarly, Dhiren Barot, a British convert to Islam who was given a forty-year jail sentence in 2006 for plotting various bomb blasts in Britain and the US, reportedly underwent 'lengthy training in Pakistan near the disputed region of Kashmir in 1995', learning how to use an AK-47, grenades and chemicals.42 These techniques might have been used in his subsequent planned terrorist activities, which included setting off a radioactive 'dirty bomb' and gassing the Heathrow Express train.43 It is possible that Barot was trained by the ISI, given its control over camps sending jihadists into Kashmir.

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Just how enlightened Musharraf was, was further revealed a few months later, when in May 2007 riots broke out in Karachi leaving over 40 people dead. They had been instigated by the Muttahidi Quami Movement (MQM),

which is headed by Altaf Hussein in London; Hussein had been granted British citizenship during the Blair years, but is prevented from returning to Pakistan since he faces criminal charges there. When asked why Hussein was not deported before being given citizenship, a British diplomat said that ‘he has not committed a crime on British soil’ – a refrain consistent with the

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policies of Londonistan.69 Set up in 1984 by General Zia to act as a counter to the Pakistan Peoples Party, the MQM was seen by Musharraf as playing a similar role and was now a partner in a coalition government in Sindh province.70 The riots broke out when MQM supporters tried to block the exit from Karachi airport of Iftikhar Chaudhry, the chief justice suspended by Musharraf for failing to be sufficiently pliant to the dictator’s needs. According to one eyewitness account, ‘many of the 15,000 police and security forces deployed in the city stood idly by as armed activists’ from the MQM blocked Chaudhry’s exit. Indeed, ‘with plumes of smoke billowing over the city … there were extraordinary scenes as gunmen on motorbikes pumped bullets into crowds demonstrating against Pakistan’s Pervez Musharraf, while police stood idly by and watched.’ The report also noted that Hussein ‘coordinated opposition to Mr Chaudhry’s arrival and addressed crowds gathered on the streets of Karachi in a mobile phone call relayed by loudspeakers.’71 Yet the riots only received one cursory mention in the British parliament, when Foreign Office Minister Geoff Hoon was questioned by George Galloway about Hussein’s role in fomenting these riots – in reply, the minister failed even to mention the subject, which quickly slipped into oblivion.72

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Some of the leaked memos explicitly showed why Britain wanted to collaborate with the Brotherhood. Ambassador Plumbly suggested in his June 2005 memo that talking to the Islamists could be beneficial since ‘we might gain useful information’ – a policy consistent with the British strategy of recruiting extremists as informers, as we have seen. But Plumbly also wrote that the British interest in Egypt was to press the Mubarak regime to promote political reform and that ‘the road that takes us there may well be bumpy, and it will certainly include a good deal more pressure from the Muslim Brothers on the streets’. Thus Plumbly clearly saw the Brotherhood as a lever to bring about internal change, a policy which, I have argued above, was also one of the perceived benefits of hosting extremist groups in Londonistan. The ambassador did not propose that Britain directly ‘encourage the Brothers’ or press the Mubarak regime to legalise it, since this would jeopardise London’s relations with Cairo; however, if the Brotherhood were to be ‘repressed aggressively, we will need to respond’.37 Similarly, Angus McKee had recognised that the Brotherhood ‘remain the largest and most effective opposition grouping in Egypt. Its ability to mobilise support and its critique of the current system are far more effective

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Many officials in the Saudi security services have been suspected of being al-Qaida supporters. Mabaheth, the Saudi body responsible for countering al-Qaida, is believed to have been penetrated by it – its staff was 80 per cent sympathetic to the Islamic insurgents, according to a source with first-hand knowledge of the unit speaking in 2004.60 There have also been claims that some of the bomb attacks inside Saudi Arabia in recent years would not have been possible without the collusion of the National Guard or other security organisations.61 Abdel Bari

> Atwan, the editor of the London-based newspaper, al-Quds alArabi, has argued that al-Qaida was party to official intelligence information about some assassinations in 2003 and 2004.62 The official enemy, Iran, has been constantly accused by London and Washington of helping the insurgents in Iraq, which has been equally constantly reported by the media. Yet Saudi Arabia has provided the bulk of foreign jihadists fighting there. The US military estimated in mid-2007 that 45 per cent of the foreign fighters in Iraq were Saudis and that they had carried out more suicide bombings than those of any nationality; indeed, half of all Saudis reportedly went to Iraq as suicide bombers.63 Two years into the war it was estimated that over 2,000 Saudis had volunteered to go to Iraq, of whom 350 had already been killed.64 By late 2006, Saudi citizens were providing millions of dollars in funding to Sunni insurgents in Iraq, much of it used to buy weapons.65 Furthermore, it appears that some Saudi militants

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> At the same time, allegations continued to surface concerning bribes from Britain's largest arms company, BAE Systems, to the Saudi regime, prompting an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO), which was extraordinarily stopped by Tony Blair in late 2006.80 Blair argued that proceeding with the enquiry 'would have been devastating for our relationship with an important country with whom we cooperate closely on terrorism, on security, on the Middle East peace process.'81 Britain had around £15 billion worth of investments

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> and joint ventures in Saudi Arabia, which was by far Britain's largest trading partner in the Middle East and its largest market for exports outside of OECD countries.82 However, British ministers, notably Gordon Brown, as chancellor in Blair's government, led a push to deepen still further the financial interdependence between Britain and the Saudis and the wider Islamic world – a direct continuation of the policies decided on by Brown's Conservative predecessors in 1973. In 2006 and 2007 Brown and his then deputy at the treasury, Ed Balls, delivered half a dozen speeches all on the same theme – how to make the City of London the favoured destination for 'Islamic finance'. Brown noted in June 2006, for example, that following his recent visit to Saudi Arabia he 'saw how the City is becoming the investment location of choice for the Middle East and Muslim countries all over the world.'83

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> the 1990s, the Clinton, Major and Blair governments had regular contacts with the principal Shia opposition force in Iraq, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), based in and supported by Tehran, as discussed in Chapter 13. The Shias, who made up the majority of the population, had been brutally suppressed under Saddam's rule, and Sunnis had dominated Iraq ever since Britain had created the country and put King Faisal on the throne in 1921. In August 2002, in the run-up to the invasion, the US invited SCIRI to an opposition gathering in Washington, along with five other groups. SCIRI also played a prominent part in pre-invasion opposition conferences in London in December 2002 and in Iraqi Kurdistan in February 2003.3 British officials were in regular contact with SCIRI both in London and Tehran at the time of the invasion.4 US planning for post-invasion Iraq was partly

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> Washington has since regarded SCIRI – which removed the word ‘revolution’ from its name in 2007 to become the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) – as its ‘privileged instrument’ with which it is in a ‘cosy relationship’, according to the International Crisis Group.7 ISCI’s former leader, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, who was succeeded by his son, Ammar, on his death in 2009, was cast as a moderate by the US and Britain, meeting President George Bush at the White House in 2004 and in 2006. Then Foreign Secretary

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> Overall, British expediency, of working with whatever forces to promote their interests, in a situation of political weakness and widespread local opposition to the British presence, was again in evidence during the occupation of Iraq. In particular, British policies reinforced sectarian and factional fault-lines, an outcome typical of the colonial strategy of divide and rule, with grave mmediate, and uncertain long-term, consequences for the people of Iraq and the wider region.

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> Lieutenant General David Richards, the former Commander of British Forces in Afghanistan who became chief of the general staff, described the fighting as ‘probably as intense as anything the British army has seen since Korea’.51 This was well before 2009, a year when British casualties rose to their highest level since the Falklands War, to over 100 during the year. By the end of 2011, nearly 400 British troops had been killed and over 1,800 wounded in action in Afghanistan.52 During 2001–05, some analysis suggests that

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> The military leaders of the Afghan insurgency inflicting casualties on the British are a roll call of those supported by Whitehall in the 1980s. The past is again returning to haunt British policy in Afghanistan, and British soldiers, along with Afghan civilians, are paying the highest price for this blowback. One major insurgent leader is Jalalludin Haqqani, whose ‘Haqqani network’, a group of militants which includes his son, Sirajuddin, is spearheading the war against NATO and government forces.66 Now in his seventies, Jalalludin Haqqani was a military leader in the US-backed Younis Khalis faction of the Hezb-e-Islami group in the 1980s, and worked with the US and ISI to train and deploy volunteer mujahideen fighters to fight the Soviets.67 Britain also supported the Khalis faction in the 1980s, providing training and missiles to one of Haqqani’s commanders, Hadji Abdul Haq. One of Khalis’ junior commanders in the 1980s was Mohammed Omar, now Mullah Omar, the present overall leader of the Taliban whose closest aide is now Haqqani.

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> The Haqqani network has been provided with huge stockpiles of arms and ammunition by Mullah Omar and been charged with coordinating suicide attacks throughout the country. It is believed to have been behind the deadly July 2008 attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul which killed 58 people.68 Haqqani is also suspected of running much of the insurgency in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan, carrying out car bombings and kidnappings, including spectacular attacks on US military installations. Sirajuddin Haqqani is reported as being based in

> North Waziristan in Pakistan, where he controls military operations spanning alQaida, Pakistani and Afghan fighters.69 Another military commander in Afghanistan is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose faction of the Hezb-e-Islami has organised various bombings of government and foreign forces, such as one attack in August 2008 that killed 10 French soldiers. Hekmatyar said in a rare interview that his fighters helped Bin Laden escape from the US offensive in the Tora Bora mountains of Afghanistan after 9/11.70 Now in his early sixties, Whitehall officials met Hekmatyar at least twice during the 1980s and provided covert aid and training to this ruthless killer to enable his forces to fight the Soviets.71

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> Soon after Mubarak was removed, in early March 2011, Foreign Office Minister Alastair Burt was reported by the Muslim Brotherhood's website to be conducting a two day visit to Egypt in which he would meet senior politicians and key opposition figures such as the Brotherhood, although it is unclear whether meetings with the Brotherhood went ahead.32 The following month, however, the British Consul-General in Alexandria, Marie-Louise Archer, and another Foreign Office official, Martin Hetringen, visited Muslim Brotherhood officials at the latter's new headquarters in Alexandria which had recently been opened by Mohamed Badie, the Brotherhood's leader in Egypt.33 The meeting, hosted by Hamdi Hassan, assistant secretary-general of the Muslim Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc, was not reported in the mainstream British media and is not mentioned on the Foreign Office website. Archer was, however, quoted in the Jerusalem Post as saying that the meeting was part of 'British efforts to increase cooperation and accepting cultural differences with Egypt's political and intellectual trends after the January 25 revolt' while the Foreign Office told the paper that 'we will continue to have contact with those members of the Muslim Brotherhood who are a part of, or are likely to become a part of, the current dialogue'.34 The Muslim Brotherhood's official website reported that Hetringen expressed the British government's 'desire to open the door for direct political dialogue with the Brothers', and noted that Foreign Office delegations had previously been keen to hold meetings and contacts with the group's leaders and members, 'despite obstacles placed in their way'.35

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> British re-engagement with the Brotherhood has been mirrored by US policy: the media has reported that the Obama administration has 'reassessed' its relationship with the Brotherhood, resumed formal contacts with it and that is 'ready to cooperate' with it so long as the Brotherhood respects the rule of democracy, minorities' rights and human rights.41 The latter concerns are mainly for public relations purposes since the priority in Washington and London is to ensure a pro-Western political transition in Egypt that protects Western financial investments. Also important to the US is that Egypt maintains its peace treaty with, and acquiescent approach to, Israel and the latter's policies in the West Bank and Gaza. British planners can be assumed to be little concerned about the Muslim

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> The states listed in Clinton's cable are those with which the British coalition government has recently announced a significant deepening of relations. In October 2010, for example, the Queen welcomed the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh al-Thani, to Windsor Castle.81 During the visit, a joint statement by Cameron and al-Thani noted that Qatar and Britain 'enjoy a special defence relationship' underpinned by a Defence Cooperation Arrangement

signed in 2006, involving British military training of the Qatari armed forces in Qatar and Britain. It also noted that Qatar has a diverse range of investments in Britain and is a major supplier of energy, providing 11 per cent of Britain's gas demand.82 As regards Kuwait, David Cameron announced in February 2011 the creation of a UK-Kuwait Trade and Investment Task Force, a commitment to double trade to $4 billion a year by 2015, and the signature of a memorandum of understanding on trade and technical cooperation.83 The Kuwait Investment Authority has its overseas headquarters in London and has invested some £150 billion over the last fifty years, the majority of it in Britain.84 The Gulf states including Saudi Arabia now account for around half of all British arms sales and the government estimates that they will spend around $100 billion on 'defence and security' technology over the next five years.85

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Sultan Qaboos of Oman, meanwhile, has been in power since a British coup installed him in 1970, and became the world's longest serving ruler once Qadafi was overthrown, a fact not advertised by Whitehall. Qaboos' regime, a major British ally, was described as 'enlightened and effective' by then International Development Minister Alan Duncan in October 2010.89 In reality, Oman is an absolute monarchy with almost all power concentrated in the hands of the Sultan, who serves as chief of state and head of government, supreme commander of the armed forces, prime minister, and minister of defence, foreign affairs and finance, in addition to personally appointing all other ministers. But Saudi Arabia remains the biggest prize for

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Following the intervention, Amnesty International noted that 'the Bahraini government launched a clearly planned and orchestrated crackdown using excessive force to suppress protests calling for political change and reform', while 'security forces used shotguns, rubber bullets, tear gas and, in some cases, live ammunition, sometimes at very close range, and in circumstances where the use of weapons ... could not be justified'.104 Over 600 civilians were detained without charge in unknown conditions, including doctors, lawyers, human rights workers, academics and youth bloggers. At the same time, some 2,000 Shia workers who stayed away from work during the unrest were sacked without any unemployment insurance while teachers and students were expelled from schools and universities.105 Two months after the intervention, Amnesty was still documenting the government's 'relentless crackdown on human rights', as emergency powers were used to arrest people without judicial warrant and detain incommunicado protesters and political activists, while some detainees had been tortured or ill-treated following arrest. Amnesty also noted 'suspicions that the whole of the majority Shia population of Bahrain is being punished for the February-March

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The Defence Intelligence Agency also stated that the destabilisation of Syria 'creates the ideal atmosphere for AQI to return to its old pockets in Mosul and Ramadi, and will provide renewed momentum under the presumption of unifying the jihad among Sunni Iraq and Syria, and the rest of the Sunnis in the Arab world against what it considers one enemy, the dissenters.'9 The idea that the US basically approved of the rise of Islamic State at this time is given further support by confidential comments, which were subsequently leaked, from John Kerry, then Secretary of State. Kerry suggested that the US was happy to see Islamic State grow in power in order to weaken the Assad regime and force it to negotiate. He said in 2016: Daesh [i.e., Islamic State]

> was threatening the possibility of going to Damascus and so forth … We were watching. We saw that Daesh was growing in strength, and we thought Assad was threatened. We thought, however, we could probably manage, that Assad would then negotiate. Instead of negotiating, he got Putin to support him.10

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> As journalist Patrick Cockburn has written, 'jihadi groups ideologically close to al-Qaida have been relabelled as moderate if their actions are deemed supportive of US policy aims'.60 In fact, the evidence suggests that the FSA was in effect allied to Islamic State until the end of 2013 and was still collaborating with it in 2014, despite many tensions between the groups.61 'We have good relations with our brothers in the

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> The new Islamic Front, created in November 2013 with apparent British encouragement and involvement, was a fusion of Salafist, jihadist and Islamist groups, not as extreme in ideology as Islamic State or al-Nusra but nevertheless far from the 'moderates' claimed as representing the FSA. It openly called for sharia rule instead of secular democracy.121 The Islamic Front said it had formed to build an 'independent political, military and social formation' to topple the Assad regime and build an Islamic state. It was estimated that the coalition's forces might comprise at least 45,000 fighters and

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> was funded, once again, by Saudi Arabia.122 Many of the groups that joined the Islamic Front, whom British officials may have met at this time, had regularly worked with alNusra. They included Liwa al-Tawhid – a group armed by Qatar and which coordinated attacks with al-Nusra, noted above – and Ahrar al-Sham – a hardline Islamist group that rejected the FSA. Both groups contained foreign jihadists, including individuals from Britain. 123 The British connection to Ahrar al-Sham is especially

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> instructive. Since 2012, Ahrar al-Sham had primarily coordinated its attacks against the Syrian army with al-Nusra, while the latter regarded Ahrar al-Sham as its closest ally.124 Moreover, Ahrar al-Sham worked with Islamic State until January 2014.125 The Telegraph wrote in 2014:

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> The case of Moazzam Begg is especially revealing in this regard. A British court case for alleged terrorist offences against Begg, who had been incarcerated in Guantánamo prison, collapsed in 2014 after MI5 belatedly gave police and prosecutors a series of documents that detailed the agency's extensive contacts with him before and after his trips to Syria in 2011–12. In Syria, Begg investigated reports of US and British rendition operations and interviewed former prisoners of the Assad regime. However, Begg maintains that he was in close contact with MI5, keeping it abreast of his plans. The contacts began after he alleged in a blog that during a trip to Syria in July 2012 he had uncovered MI5's role in intercepting a phone call by a British Libyan dissident who lived in Syria. Begg said a few months after he had made this allegation that he was approached by an MI5 officer 'who

said they wanted to talk to me about my views on the situation in Syria'. Meetings were held between MI5 officers and Begg at which his travel plans were discussed and in which he explained he was assisting opposition fighters in their war against the Assad regime. In one meeting Begg said MI5 was concerned about 'the possibility of Britons in Syria being radicalised and returning to pose a potential threat to national security'. Critically, he added that he was 'assured by MI5' that he could return to Syria and continue his work 'unhindered'. Begg insists he was always perfectly candid with MI5 and says the agency assured him no attempt would be made to hinder him if he wanted to return to Syria.156

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Aimen Dean, an early member of al-Qaida who in 1998 became a spy for MI5 and MI6, said in an interview in 2015 that he had worked with the security services to 'encourage' UK-based radicals to join the jihad in order to spy on them.157 This is a continuation of the security services' policy of monitoring and working with extremists outlined in Chapter 16. As regards Syria, whether this policy amounted to more than just monitoring and also became one of actually encouraging fighters to join the war against Assad as de facto British proxies, is unclear.

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What is also clear is that Britain's Syria policy has contributed to the terrorist threat at home. Hundreds of Britons, many outright jihadists working with the most violent groups, are believed to have been trained in the Syrian theatre and then encouraged to return to the UK to launch attacks. One defector from Islamic State has said that recruits from Britain, Europe and the US were being indoctrinated in extremist anti-Western ideology, trained in how to make and detonate car bombs and suicide vests and sent home to start new terror cells.159 The analysis above suggests that some of these individuals may have been trained by British forces as members of the FSA before joining still more extremist forces such as Islamic State.

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The extent of Britain's covert and military activity during 2015–17 is unprecedented since 1945. Never have there been so many simultaneous covert operations and sustained military actions in so many countries. By September 2017, the US/UK-led coalition fighting Islamic State had dropped over 99,000 bombs and missiles in over 13,000 air strikes in both Iraq and Syria; most have been undertaken by the US, with Britain responsible for over 1,300 strikes in Iraq and over 250 in Syria.5 The Ministry of Defence says it has dropped 3,500 bombs and killed 3,000 members of Islamic State.6 The independent monitoring group, Airwars, estimates the number of civilian deaths from these airstrikes to be at least 5,486.7 The scale and intensity of this war against Islamic State has dislodged the group from the vast territory it secured in 2014. By late 2017, it had been pushed out of 60 per cent of the area previously under its rule, but it still controls large parts of eastern and central Syria and pockets in Iraq.8 Western bombing of Islamic State in the Middle East has coincided with a striking increase in terrorism in Europe, although British ministers (and much of the media) refuse to link these two factors. In the three years from September 2014, Europe was hit by over 40 terrorist attacks, mainly in the name of Islamic State, although few attacks are believed to be carried out under the orders of its leadership.9 In January 2015, shootings at the Charlie Hebdo magazine offices and elsewhere in Paris killed 17 people, followed in November by coordinated attacks on restaurants, bars and the Bataclan theatre which left over 130 people dead and dozens injured. The

following March, three coordinated suicide bombings of the Brussels airport and metro killed a further 30 people. Four months later, a truck was deliberately driven into people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, France, killing 86 people. Then in December, 12 people were killed after another truck was driven into a Christmas market in Berlin.10 In 2017, Britain was the object of several gruesome

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investigation by the online site Middle East Eye found that the British government operated an ‘open door’ policy that allowed Libyan exiles and British-Libyan citizens to join the 2011 uprising despite the fact that some had been subject to counter-terrorism control orders. Several former rebel fighters now back in the UK told Middle East Eye that they had been able to travel to Libya with ‘no questions asked’; these dissidents were members of the LIFG and most were from Manchester. One said that, as he was travelling back to Libya in May 2011, he was approached by two counter-terrorism police officers in the departure lounge who told him that if he was going to fight he would be committing a crime. After providing them with the name and phone number of an MI5 officer he had spoken to previously, and following a quick phone call to him, he was waved through. As he waited to board the plane, he said the same MI5 officer called him to tell him that he had ‘sorted it out’.15 The Daily Mail reported that:

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However, the story is far from altogether clear. My research found that the control orders on the Libyan dissidents were actually rescinded in 2009 under the Gordon Brown government, and not in 2011. Therefore, they were not released from these orders just in time to fight Qadafi; however, their passports were returned early in 2011, enabling them to travel to Libya. There is no evidence that Salman and Ramadan Abedi were personally encouraged by the security services to travel to Libya at that time, but they were part of a broader movement that appears to have been given approval. What is also striking about this is the LIFG’s connections to Islamic State. A large number of LIFG fighters in Libya in 2011 had earlier fought alongside the Islamic State of Iraq – the al-Qaida entity which later established a presence in Syria and renamed itself Islamic State. These fighters were among those joining the British-backed anti-Qadafi rebellion. The US Army’s Combating Terrorism Centre

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In addition, the British/NATO war in Libya, which overthrew Qadafi and created a political and security vacuum, helped establish a fertile ground for the rise of violent jihadist ideology and extremist militias. Salman Abedi also appears to have benefitted from this. He returned from the now largely lawless, anarchic Libya a few days before carrying out the Manchester attack in May 2017. It is possible he received training in bomb-making there from a unit of Islamic State; this was the Katibat al-Battar al-Libi group believed to be behind a number of attacks in Europe, including the Paris attacks in November 2015. Two senior US intelligence officials told the New York Times that Abedi was in contact with al-Battar members both on his visits to Tripoli and by phone while in the UK.20 Abedi may also have travelled to Syria to receive training among the numerous jihadist and extremist groups operating in the country, again partly thanks to the British foreign policy priorities outlined in the previous chapter. Reports also suggest that Abedi had links to an

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> Islamic State cell operating in south Manchester, in particular a recruiter called Raphael Hostey who ‘sponsored hundreds of terror recruits’; Abedi reportedly had a ‘significant’ connection to Hostey, who is believed to have been killed in a drone strike in Syria.21 Abedi was also reportedly connected to another Islamic State recruiter, Abdalraouf Abdallah, a Libyan refugee who was jailed in Britain in 2016 on counts of funding and preparing acts of terrorism and was involved in trying to recruit other Manchester-based extremists to join the group. Ramadan Abedi cared for Abdalraouf in Libya after he was shot and paralysed fighting there. Prosecutors described Abdallah as being ‘at the centre of a jihadist network facilitating foreign fighters’, and sources said that Salman Abedi and Abdallah were ‘friends’.22 Indeed, Salman Abedi made two prison visits to Abdalraouf Abdallah in the months leading up to the Manchester attack.23 In 2011, both Abdalraouf Abdallah and Ramadan

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> There is yet another intriguing connection between British foreign policy and the Manchester attack. Ramadan Abedi was an admirer and acquaintance of the al-Qaida commander Nazih Abdul-Hamed Nabih al-Ruqai’i, a man better known by the nomde-guerre Anas al-Liby, who was previously a close aide of Osama Bin Laden.36 Al-Liby, who also lived in Manchester, is believed to have been a member of the LIFG cell paid by MI6 to attempt to assassinate Qadafi in the 1996 plot.37 As noted in Chapter 13, alLiby was given political asylum in Britain in 1995 after a failed al-Qaida plot to assassinate Hosni Mubarak, then president of Egypt. When the Egyptian government requested al-Liby’s extradition, it was turned down by the British government on the grounds that he could not receive a fair trial. However, it is reported that al-Liby was being protected by the British security services and was allowed to stay in Britain in return for aiding the plot to kill Qadafi.38 A recent detailed investigation into the Abedis by the Manchester Evening News notes that ‘Al-Liby, like Ramadan Abedi, is believed to have secured residency in the UK because of his opposition to Qadafi’s regime’.39

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> Liby would go on to help plan the 1998 al-Qaida embassy bombings in Africa, but was not arrested by the British authorities until 1999,before being released due to lack of evidence. By the time the police tried to arrest him again in May 2000, he had fled his Manchester flat, leaving behind a 180-page jihadist guide to the ‘overthrow of godless regimes’ – a text which became known as the ‘Manchester Manual’. Al-Liby stayed on the run until October 2013, when he was captured by US commandos in Tripoli. In addition to the Manchester bombing, the British and Qatari connection to terrorism in Britain extends to another attack. In June 2017 three sympathisers of Islamic State drove a van into pedestrians on London Bridge,ran to the nearby Borough market area and began stabbing people in and around restaurants and pubs. The terrorists, who wore fake explosive vests, killed eight people and injured 48 before being shot dead by police. One of the London attackers was Rachid Redouane, a Moroccan who gained residence in Britain after marrying an Irish woman, enabling him to secure an EU residence card.40 Redouane, like the Abedis, fought in Libya in 2011 and joined a militia which went on to send jihadist fighters to Syria. In Libya, he is believed to have fought with the Liwa al-Ummah group, which was formed by a deputy of Abdul-Hakim Belhaj, the former emir of the LIFG.41 That deputy was Mahdi al-Harati, an Irish-Libyan who led the rebel Tripoli Brigade against Qadafi’s forces during the battle of Tripoli in 2011.42 This Tripoli Brigade of the Liwa al-Ummah received training from Qatari special forces in Nalut, a town in Libya’s western mountains in 2011.43 Thus, it is possible that Redouane was trained by the

kindle

> Qatari military. Furthermore, it is possible that this training was even presided over by British and American ‘liaison’ officers: the Wall Street Journal has reported that a team of about 60 Qataris helped set up rebel command centres in the mountain city of Zintan, which is near Nalut, Benghazi and later in Tripoli and that this rebel training involved around 30 Western officers, including Britons, French and several Americans.44 The story then moves on to Syria. Fighters in the