

Book Review: Peter Lance Indicts FBI/DoJ, but Leaves CIA as Unindicted Co-conspirator - 911Truth.org

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by Michael Richardson

Most of the journalistic foundation for the 9/11 truth movement is a vast mosaic of articles, each containing one or more significant fragments, and most have been written by journalists who had no particular dedication or greater awareness of 9/11. Those who have written in depth about 9/11 have used this mosaic (and of course have been aided considerably by resources like Paul Thompson's Complete 9/11 Timeline), but few actually do on-the-ground journalism. Peter Lance is one of the few investigative journalists who has dedicated himself to the historical thicket of 9/11. In addition to using the mosaic, he travels to interview people, develops contacts inside the key agencies, gets his hands on damning FBI 302 documents, and bothers people who deserve to be bothered. For the last four years, he has obsessed on 9/11 and many of its deep-political tendrils, producing the equivalent of dozens of rich, original articles.

Lance's implied theory of 9/11 — that the 9/11 hijacking plot basically slipped past the greasy fingers of a corrupt and egotistical DOJ/FBI — no doubt irritates many in the movement for truth about 9/11 for whom the "inside job" theory is creed, yet he has unearthed some of the most important gems in the struggle to bring real truth and justice to 9/11. Most importantly, he has shown how the efforts of the Southern New York division of the Justice Department, since the early 90s, have been half-baked, ridiculously negligent, and at times blantly criminal. His work has been instrumental in fleshing out the continuum between the New York cell of the Blind Sheikh (proto-al Qaeda) in the early 1990s and the crimes of September 11, 2001, tracking the FBI all along in its failures and refusals to expose, arrest, and convict. In *Triple Cross*, a whole chapter is given to a New Jersey check cashing store which, had the FBI used common sense and monitored the place once they knew, early on, that it was a hub of al Qaeda activity, they probably would have snuffed out the 9/11 plot before Clinton had left office. Lance has also definitively fingered Dietrich Snell as the 9/11 Commission staff member who forged the Commission's official timeline into a deception by claiming that the 9/11 plot was conceived in 1998 — two years after Snell's DOJ office had known of a planes-as-missiles plot from interrogations of Abdul Hakim Murad.

Ali Mohamed is a neglected rosetta stone for understanding al Qaeda, and with *Triple Cross*, Lance has created the most expansive and detailed account of this "master spy" to date. He also shows how Mohamed's U.S. exploits were interwoven with key people and events covered in Lance's two previous books (*1000 Years for Revenge* and *Cover Up*), as Mohamed had trained the Blind Sheikh's followers in New York in the early 1990s during the time Mohamed was stationed at Fort Bragg. The re-telling of earlier narratives makes this book Lance's definitive oeuvre on 9/11, but *Triple Cross* still reads like a new book; first because most of us would need a refresher on the sprawling material, but also because Lance has unearthed quite a few more fascinating nuggets. For example, he further solidifies the case that Ramzi Yousef, from his New York jail cell in 1996, orchestrated the timed bombing of TWA Flight 800. After the publication of his last book, Sibel Edmonds put him in touch with a "recently retired NSA staffer" who saw a translation of an NSA intercept

originally spoken in Baluchi (Yousef's native tongue) which read, "Flight 800 . . . what had to be done has been done." This intercept had also been mysteriously, temporarily removed from the normal translation stream long enough to exclude it from the FBI's Flight 800 investigation.

Ali Mohamed was involved with most of the major al Qaeda attacks against U.S. interests: the assassination of Rabbi Meier Kahane in 1990, the 1993 WTC bombing, the African Embassy bombings in 1998 and, even though he was arrested in late 1998, Lance proposes that he also helped train some of the 9/11 hijackers in hijacking techniques. Astoundingly, Mohamed participated in these operations while also being a U.S. citizen, being enlisted in the U.S. military (serving at Fort Bragg on two occasions), and being an FBI informant in California. Importantly (and much more on this below), he also had ties to the CIA. Lance shows Mohamed moving snake-like between U.S. agencies and military postings, often flaunting his activities with al Qaeda at a time when the FBI certainly knew what this meant. Importantly, in the early 90s, Mohamed was debriefed about Bin Laden and al Qaeda by FBI and NSA counter-terrorism officers, but all records of this interview — which would prove that the government was aware of Bin Laden's anti-U.S. intentions years earlier than it has claimed — have been "lost."

Lance has a serious, longstanding bone to pick with the Southern New York division of the DoJ and the FBI, and has followed them for years, tracking their mindboggling misjudgments and fits of corruption. Patrick Fitzgerald was in charge of bringing bin Laden to justice prior to 9/11, and while he convicted some members of al Qaeda, he also botched the tracking of the remnants of al Qaeda after 2000, and allowed Ali Mohamed to plea bargain his way to, it seems, eventual release.

The title-concept of the book, "*Triple Cross*," is for Lance mainly hyperbole, a kind of mega-double-crossing, a masterful fleecing and betrayal of U.S. agencies, for Lance views Mohamed as, at his core, an al Qaeda spy who was fundamentally allied to Ayman al Zawahiri and al Qaeda, even as he was a U.S. citizen and served in the U.S. Army. As Lance tells it, Mohamed basically tied together the shoelaces of the U.S. team as it also struggled with information walls, corrupt agents, and bureaucratic in-fighting. The characterization of Ali Mohamed as a triple spy or triple agent (as opposed to a double agent) is also for Lance hyperbole, because he describes Mohamed as a connection between two major parties — the U.S. and al Qaeda. Yet there are clues in *Triple Cross* that "triple agent" could be more literal. Mohamed as "triple agent" makes more sense when one considers whether Mohamed's role with the CIA was at odds with the basic missions of the U.S. military and the FBI.

Lance's principal FBI source, Jack Cloonan, relays a story told to him by someone at CIA: In 1984, Mohamed "walked into the CIA station in Cairo" to volunteer as an asset, and was assigned to penetrate a Hamburg, Germany mosque. Mohamed then, according to this story, "gave up the operation," and was supposedly, thereafter, dropped or "spurned" by the CIA. (A very similar story is also told by Lawrence Wright in *The Looming Tower*, but is unattributed.) But there is reason to doubt this story because, in 1985, according to one press account Lance cites, Ali's ability to travel freely into the U.S. "was the result of an action initiated by Langley". (Wright describes this as a "visa waiver program" — making it sound more routine.) Lance also speculates that the CIA "may have run interference for Ali as he sought entry to the United States and a position of influence at Fort Bragg." The CIA was apparently using Mohamed, along with the rest of the nascent al Qaeda network, as an asset in the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Lance asks: "Did Ali Mohamed . . .

maintain his ties to the CIA? Did he get a leg up with his visa and help slipping past the watch list?"

Lance's questions about Mohamed's ties to the CIA end rather precipitously here, though he does reveal a clear pattern of support coming from the CIA (or, one could theorize, the DIA). He quotes a *Boston Globe* story from 1995, that "Ali's 1985 entry into the United States 'was the result of an action initiated by Langley'." A California associate of Mohamed is quoted as saying, "Everyone in the community knew he was working as a liaison between the CIA and the Afghan cause." But Lance's references to CIA are only an implicit raising of questions. Clearly, other questions need to be asked more explicitly: What was Mohamed's relationship to the CIA? What allegiances, obligations, and benefits would have resulted from such ties? What would the implications have been of "maintaining" such ties and allegiances until 1998 when Mohamed played a key role in the African embassy bombings? Lance applies none of his normal investigative zeal to Mohamed's CIA role, and this makes for a serious black hole in *Triple Cross*.

Importantly, Ali Mohamed may have worked for the CIA before 1984, when he was still an officer in the Egyptian army. On the first page of *Triple Cross*, Lance describes a crestfallen Mohamed speaking before a federal judge in 2000: "In short but deliberate sentences, Mohamed peeled back the top layer of the secret life he'd led since 1981, when radical members of his Egyptian army unit gunned down Nobel Prize winner Anwar Sadat." Later, Lance describes how, during the actual assassination, Mohamed had been at Fort Bragg (in North Carolina) on an officer exchange program, and that this had "shielded him from the Sadat murder indictment." This involvement with the Sadat assassination is an important piece of the puzzle because, according to other sources, the CIA was to some degree responsible for Sadat's killing. Joseph Trento, in his 2005 book, "Prelude to Terror," interviewed former high-ranking CIA agents about this period in Egypt, and one of Trento's fragments puts a new lens over Ali Mohamed. Trento describes how protecting Sadat had actually been a task assigned to the CIA:

Orchestrating much of what was going on in Egypt was a CIA agent named William Buckley . . . Operating out of Cairo Station, Buckley supervised a vast array of spies within Sadat's regime. In 1980, Buckley was put in charge of training Sadat's personal bodyguards after the CIA took over the contract from J.J. Cappucci and Associates....

Neil Livingstone, who by this time was involved in J.J. Cappucci, described the operation. "We did the training of Sadat's praetorian guard to protect Sadat. And then the contract was taken away from us and [given] back to the Agency, and he got killed. We never would have permitted the kind of security that was evident at the time Sadat was killed," Livingstone said. 1

Trento also reports that Sadat's vice president Hosni Mubarak had been on the CIA payroll in the late 70s, and that he had been having his palms greased by a weapons delivery company called EATSCO — a CIA front/side company run by the notorious Edwin P. Wilson. According to Trento, Anwar Sadat had, by 1980, started an investigation into Mubarak's corrupt involvement with EATSCO. Both the CIA and Mubarak had motives to have Sadat dead. The CIA of course, having the contract to protect Sadat, possessed the means, at least to leave a critical security door open. As a "master spy" who spoke four languages, as an officer in the very unit that assassinated Sadat, and as someone who at the very time of Sadat's assassination in 1981 had been part of a U.S.-Egypt officer

exchange program to Fort Bragg (the seat of U.S. Special Forces), it is not a stretch to infer that Ali Mohamed had been among CIA station chief Buckley's "vast array of spies within Sadat's Regime". Mohamed's (apparent) extremist leanings, and his status as an officer raise the possibility that he knew about the assassination plot while also being a "liason" to the CIA.

Throughout his career, Lance shows, Mohamed would often play the role of "emissary" or "liason". Where the CIA and Sadat's assassination are concerned, with the hypothesis that Mohamed could have played such a role, a more descriptive term would be "block cut-out", or someone whose apparent ideology and behavior (in this case as a member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad) made him into a trusted inside member of a criminal/terrorist cell, but who was actually taking orders from, and/or passing information to, another party, in this case, the CIA.

Nafeez Ahmed, in *The War on Truth*, addresses Mohamed's connections to the CIA in some depth. One rather eye-popping account that Ahmed relates is that of Yossef Bodansky, a former U.S. intelligence official. According to Bodansky:

In the first half of 1997, Ayman al-Zawahiri . . . met a man called Abu-Umar al-Amriki [a likely alias for Ali Mohamed] at a camp near Peshawar on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. High level Islamist leaders insist that in this meeting, Abu-Umar al-Amriki made Zawahiri an offer: The US will not interfere with nor intervene to prevent Islamists' rise to power in Egypt if the Islamist Mujahedin currently in Bosnia-Herzegovina refrain from attacking the US forces. Moreover, Abu-Umar el-Amriki promised a donation of \$50 million (from undefined sources) to Islamist charities in Egypt and elsewhere. This was not the first meeting between Abu Umar al-Amriki and al Zawahiri. Back in the 1980s, Abu Umar al-Amriki was openly acting as an emissary for the CIA with various Arab Islammist militant/terrorist movements then operating under the wings of the Afghan jihad. In the late 1980s, in one of his meetings with al-Zawahiri, Abu-Umar el-Amriki suggested that al Zawahiri would "need \$50 million to rule Egypt." At the time, al-Zawahiri interpreted this assertion as a hint that Washington would tolerate his rise to power if he could raise the money . . . The islamist leaders are convinced that in November 1997, Abu-Umar al-Amriki was speaking for the CIA — that is the uppermost echelons of the Clinton administration . . . There is no doubt that the November 1997 meeting between Abu-Umar al-Amriki took place. 2

"If true," Ahmed writes, "Bodansky's report suggests that throughout the 1990s until the 1998 embassy bombing, Mohammed was working for the CIA." And Mohamed would not have been a run-of-the-mill asset: he had incomparable combined skills as a soldier, as a spy, as a linguist, and as an undercover deal-maker — a terrorist diplomat. This diplomatic acumen, as Bodansky describes, corresponds to an extraordinary story Lance relates wherein Ali Mohamed in 1993 had "brokered an historic meeting" between the Shiite terrorist Imaz Fayez Mugniyah and (Sunni/Wahabi) Osama bin Laden. (Mugniyah in 1984 had kidnapped CIA officer William Buckley in Beirut, and Buckley was tortured for 444 days before being killed.) If "Abu-Umar al-Amriki" was indeed the same person as Ali Mohamed, this would mean that he was trusted enough by the CIA to represent the U.S. in a very dicey foreign policy maneuver.

So the story of a loose-lipped Ali Mohamed being let go by the CIA in 1984 is a highly

questionable “official story”. A more rational explanation for the existence of this story might be that it is a fabrication — or at least a half-truth — meant to distance the CIA from a man who, especially after the 1998 African embassy bombings, was becoming a major liability.

Very dark and sticky questions bubble up with the notion that Ali Mohamed has been continually a highly valued and trusted CIA operative. One can draw no conclusions, but a cascade of questions exist. What information did the CIA have about Mohamed training the Blind Sheikh’s NY cell in the early 1990s? To what degree did the CIA have oversight and command over Ali Mohamed’s activities as he facilitated the two embassy bombings in Africa? Was the CIA running an expert terrorist asset in the U.S.?

Lance describes Mohamed, after his arrest, breaking down and finally admitting to Fitzgerald and the Federal Judge, Leonard B. Sand, that he was involved in planning the embassy bombings. This came after Mohamed had been offered an “exit strategy” — some form of plea bargain according to which Mohammed would provide information about al Qaeda and testify against terrorist suspects. Says Lance:

The details of Ali Mohamed’s deal remain secret to this day. But at least one knowledgeable attorney . . . has concluded that his arrangement with the feds was clearly in Ali’s favor. **‘Mohammed has made some kind of deal with the government,’ [the attorney] believes, ‘that will surely have him out of prison on some date certain that he knows about.’** (my emphasis)

Of course, one of the crucial witnesses against Osama bin Laden (tried in absentia), in Patrick Fitzgerald’s 2000 embassy bombing trial should have been Ali Mohamed, who had already admitted to having helped plan the bombings, and had admitted to working for al Qaeda. But, even after the unprecedented plea bargain was given to Mohammed, *Fitzgerald did not call him as a witness*. It is not that Mohamed refused: Fitzgerald did not call him as a witness. This to me is the most incredible and insanely jaw-dropping moment of this book, and it’s what earns Fitzgerald his position on the cover of *Triple Cross*, lodged between bin Laden and Ali Mohamed. Here is the court transcript after Ali Mohamed’s conviction for conspiracy in the 1998 bombings (which is in *Triple Cross* on p. 360):

THE COURT: Your offer is to plead guilty to five counts charging you with conspiracy to kill nationals of the United States, conspiracy to murder, kidnap and maim at places outside the United States, conspiracy to murder, conspiracy to destroy buildings and property of the United States, and conspiracy to destroy national-defense utilities of the United States. Do you understand that pursuant to the relevant statutes, conviction on those five counts would subject you to a total maximum sentence of incarceration of life imprisonment plus any term of years. Do you understand that you would be subject to that potential sentence?

MOHAMED: Yes, your honor.

THE COURT: Do you understand that in addition to that, you would be subject to a term of supervised release of five years on Counts One, Two Three and Five and three years’ supervised release on Count Six? Do you understand that?

MOHAMED: Yes, your honor.

Amazingly here, even *before sentencing*, the judge has spelled out the terms of Mohamed's release pretty clearly. Lance writes, "As this investigation has revealed for the first time, almost six years after entering that guilty plea, Ali Mohamed has yet to be sentenced . . . Yet we can say for certain that even today . . . he remains in witness protection somewhere in the New York area."

Lance is convinced that it was the FBI's collective, and Fitzgerald's individual, fear of being exposed which led to this extraordinary judicial situation:

[Fitzgerald's] motivation in hiding Ali from public view may have been similar to that of his cocounsel Andrew McCarthy, who had sought to keep Mohamed off the stand in the Day of Terror trial. "Mohamed would have been opened up by defense lawyers and told the whole sad tale of how he'd used the Bureau and the CIA and the DIA for years," says retired special agent Joseph F. O'Brien. "The Bureau wouldn't risk that kind of embarrassment."

As for Fitzgerald's personal motive, Lance adds:

...despite multiple wiretaps monitoring conversations and faxes to the Nairobi cell right up to the day of the bombings on August 7, 1998, and despite evidence from Squad I-49's search of El-Hage's house a year earlier that Mohamed was involved with the plot, Fitzgerald and the agents of his elite unit had been unable to stop it. That's not a story that Fitzgerald would have wanted to see exposed by defense lawyers during United States vs. bin Laden.

Lance has obviously nailed something very important here, but it doesn't completely make sense. With other conspirators who have similar status, who have admitted guilt, and who have equally embarrassing tales to tell — Ramzi Yousef, Greg Scarpa Jr., and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed — the rule has been to lock these people up in solitary confinement, pretty much indefinitely, and, more recently, to torture them. Ali Mohamed, clearly, is a different animal altogether. Lance's case truly begins to rattle loose when one looks closer at Mohamed's role in the CIA. Had Mohamed actually been a highly-placed CIA operative, it would explain in *much* clearer terms why the federal government hid him for months after his arrest, booked him as "John Doe" to keep his name secret, kept him in legal suspended animation, refused to call him as a witness and, critically, actually allowed this accomplished terrorist a plea bargain wherein his eventual release was assured. Lance's explanation falls apart when one considers the supreme embarrassment the FBI and Fitzgerald would suffer were Mohamed to be released, or to escape, and then commit another enormous and heinous terrorist act — something we can all assume he is capable of. Somehow, they are assured that such a crime would not occur.

In the above quote, a "retired special agent" Joseph F. O'Brien says that Mohamed "used . . . the CIA and the DIA". There is very little evidence presented here that Mohamed "used" the CIA. That he was granted visas repeatedly, despite being on a watch list most directly points to the idea that the CIA had an interest and a purpose in allowing Mohamed passage. Other explanations — that he was somehow lucky, or slipped off the radar, or benefited from a mindless bureaucratic snafu — are indirect and less rational, but these are the default explanations by writers like Lance and Wright.

I am not saying that Lance is wrong, per se, because the FBI did indeed have plenty to hide. Admirably, Lance's modus operandi as a journalist is similar to that of a Federal

prosecutor. Like a good attorney, for the strict purpose of getting a guilty verdict, he has narrowed his focus on the defendants sitting in the courtroom — Patrick Fitzgerald, Dietrich Snell, Valerie Caproni, and other DOJ officials. The CIA has been left in the nebulous position of an “unindicted co-conspirator.” Perhaps Lance felt that introducing evidence against the CIA in this “trial” would complicate matters, confused the jury, or lead to conclusions that were too dark to be believable. Or perhaps he felt that there simply wasn’t enough evidence. These are indeed the shared prerogatives of journalists and attorneys.

Patrick Fitzgerald and his team did indeed fail to stop the bombings of the two embassies in Africa, and they bear some responsibility for not stopping the 9/11 plot. Fitzgerald — not only in his dealings with Ali Mohamed, but possibly also in the way he has handled the Valerie Plame case — has capitulated to a pattern of preserving the basic framework of high level corruption while creating the false impression of justice being served. Lance has truly indicted and convicted these FBI and DOJ figures on these counts.

Despite its black hole, anyone serious about understanding the big picture of 9/11 should read “*Triple Cross*”. Lance signs off with this: “I sincerely hope this is my last 9/11 book. I don’t want to have to write another one.” I have heard that he is working on a book about the CIA — a hopeful sign with respect to the story of Ali Mohamed because I doubt Lance would let an interesting or implicating lead go unexamined.

footnotes

1. Trento, Joseph, “Prelude to Terror”, Carrol and Graf, New York, 2005, page 247. This book is a fragmented read, but well worth it, as it shows how far back the corruption of the CIA runs — especially through Bush family veins, but also how the CIA has been a revolving door nightmare with oil industry executives, weapons dealers, and crooks in general.
2. Your knowledge about 9/11 will remain incomplete until you have read all of Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed’s *The War on Truth* (Olive Branch Press, Northampton, MA), and especially, in this context, Chapter 2, titled “Terrorism and Statecraft Part 1”. This quote is from page 51. Bodansky’s entire paper can be read here: http://www.freeman.org/m_online/feb98/bodansky.htm.