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Pipe Bombs: Frantic Denunciations of the False Flag Concept

By Prof. Graeme MacQueen
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Theme: Media Disinformation

Onto the 24-hour reality show that is U.S. politics, 15 package bombs recently made their entrance.

The devices were sent to vocal opponents of Mr. Trump, most of them prominent members of the Democratic Party. The incident became public on October 25, less than two weeks before the November 6 elections that mark the middle of Trump's first term.

Now, it is an interesting question as to whether the designated perpetrator, Cesar Sayoc, is a lone wolf terrorist or a patsy acting on behalf of larger forces. I am encouraged to see researchers exploring the second possibility. But my focus in this article is different.

The suggestion that the package bomb incidents might be false flag attacks—attacks by opponents of Trump deceptively imputing the attacks to his supporters to discredit them before the elections—was rapidly put forth. Among the fastest off the mark were right-wing pundits, so it was easy enough for various "liberals" (whatever this term means today in the U.S.) to characterize the false flag suggestion as a variety of right-wing conspiracy theory, and as both intellectually ridiculous and morally disgusting. The evident aim has been to stigmatize the concept and drive it from responsible political discourse.

Among the most prominent of the denunciations appeared in CNN and *The New York Times*.

The article by CNN Editor-at-large Chris Cillizza's was entitled, "Debunking the despicable 'false flag' theory on the mail bombs." He quoted Rush Limbaugh's claim that a "Democratic operative" could be responsible for the attacks in order to make it look as if "the Republicans are a bunch of insane lunatics." Cillizza noted that although we may be tempted to dismiss such "conspiracy crap" without comment, we must not. To refuse to comment on it is "to let it fester." We must publicly challenge it. His article, it seems, was meant to be a model of such debunking.

Screengrab from CNN

It was not a good model.

Cillizza concentrated on what he believed to be the logistical impossibilities in Limbaugh's scenario. He named two steps in the scenario:

> 1. "Someone or someones who wanted to help Democrats—and the media, I guess, somehow?—would send a series of pipe bombs to prominent Democrats across the country."
>
> 2. "Then Democrats or the media or, again, someone, would have to have coordinated with the state and local police—not to mention federal authorities—so that law enforcement said that these were functional bombs (even though, again, according to this theory, they weren't)."

He feels that simply to have named these steps is to have shown how ridiculous the hypothesis is.

Really?

There is nothing impossible about Step 1. Surely Cillizza is not saying that the faction of the U.S. intelligence community hostile to Trump—nicely represented by James Clapper and John Brennan, two recipients of the package bombs—is incapable of fashioning a few clumsy devices and sending them through the mail? The material in the 2001 anthrax envelopes was much more sophisticated and difficult to acquire than the non-functional "pipe bombs," yet the U.S. intelligence community remains a prime suspect in these attacks.

As for the purpose in sending out such bombs, one of the first questions we ask when confronted by a violent event of this sort is, *Cui bono?* Who benefits? I cannot see how Trump and his supporters benefit, whereas the benefit to mainstream Democrats—of the Clinton variety, no threat to the established order—is obvious. They get to claim the status of nonviolent, sane victim.

What about Cillizza's Step 2? I confess I am defeated by his prose. I do not know what he is trying to say. But let me speculate that he is claiming this conspiracy theory involves too many people (various levels of police, for example) and that it involves an impossibly complex deception—policing agencies portraying inoperative devices as operative.

Once again we might fruitfully examine the anthrax attacks. There was an impressive amount of coordination involved in these attacks. As far as policing was concerned, this was mainly achieved by the FBI chasing away other levels of police while keeping strict control over its own personnel when they wandered too near the truth.

But the coordination in the anthrax case went far beyond policing. Media were deeply implicated. The media faithfully set out the story they were handed by authorities: the attacks appeared to have been carried out by al-Qaeda, with a strong possibility of Iraqi involvement. This story was successfully propagated, for example, through a wide variety of newspapers, from *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* to the *Guardian*. By the end of 2001—less than four months after the attacks began—Homeland Security, the FBI and the White House had been forced to admit that neither al-Qaeda, nor Iraq, nor domestic Muslims, appeared to have had anything to do with these attacks. Instead, they came from the heart of the US Military-Industrial-Intelligence community. As to who, precisely, in this

community carried out the attacks, there remains disagreement; but even a sketchy familiarity with the anthrax attacks knocks out of Cillizza's Step 2 objections.

A useful rule of thumb is that if a thing has happened it is possible. We know a violent, coordinated and complex false flag attack is possible in the U.S. because it happened.

But if this was the best CNN could do, what about *The New York Times*? Kevin Roose produced a piece somewhat longer, although not much more thoughtful, than the CNN editor's.

THE SHIFT

'False Flag' Theory on Pipe Bombs Zooms From Right-Wing Fringe to Mainstream

Explosive devices were sent this week to CNN, at the Time Warner Center in Manhattan, as well as to prominent Democrats and critics of the president. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

By Kevin Roose

Oct. 25, 2018

Screengrab from The New York Times

Roose let us have it with the old chestnut, "conspiratorial thinking has always been with us", and then proceeded to dance lightly from the grassy knoll to the moon landing to 9/11 without troubling us with sources, evidence or other bothersome material.

If you are like me you will find yourself, in an increasingly bad mood, asking: has this young fellow carefully researched all of these incidents? Has he, in fact, carefully researched *a*

single one of them?

Like the CNN editor, Roose spends his time countering claims that the package bombs sent to prominent enemies of Mr. Trump might have been sent by people wanting to discredit Trump and his allies. He places these "conspiracy theorists" on the political right and associates them with Trump's presidency. More than this, he uses, and explains, the term "false flag" and tries hard to discredit it. "False flag philosophy—the idea that powerful groups stage threats and tragic events to advance their agendas—is now a bizarrely common element of national news stories."

This statement is a sign of progress in the opening of the American mind. We should celebrate the good news that the concept of false flag is common in political discourse, common enough that *The New York Times* feels a need to discredit it. This achievement came through much labour by many people over many years.

That Roose finds the concept "bizarre" is, of course, to be regretted, but this merely testifies to his naivety and his poor knowledge of false flag attacks, of which there have been plenty in human history (see Sources).

As a matter of fact, the particular type of false flag attack being discussed in the present case, where Group A attacks itself and blames Group B, is centuries old. In China it used to be called the Stratagem of Wounded Flesh (see Sources).

The notion that the false flag concept and the conspiracy concept are the exclusive property of the political right is absurd. They are ideas available to, and used by, all those who genuinely care about what is going on around them and wish to have an adequate intellectual toolbox. I am not on the political right and I am not a supporter of Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter and the like, but I do not for that reason choose to shut down my brain.

Although we may not want to admit it, repetition is half the battle in public fights and debates. Let us use the term "false flag" repeatedly and ensure that it remains where it apparently is at the moment: in the center of U.S. political discourse.

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Sources

1. The CNN article is as follows:

Chris Cillizza, "Debunking the despicable 'false flag' theory on the mail bombs", CNN, Octo. 25, 2018

https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/25/politics/false-flag-theory-mail-bombs-cnn-democrats/index.html

2. The *NYT* article is:

Kevin Roose, "'False Flag' Theory on Pipe Bombs Zooms From Right-Wing Fringe to Mainstream," *The New York Times*, Oct. 25, 2018.

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/business/false-flag-theory-bombs-conservative-media.html?link_id=2&can_id=279a5d1be99466f29caeefa017e74f2e&source=email-disinformation-and-anthrax-mailings-interviews-available&email_referrer=email_443498&email_subject=disinformation-and-anthrax-mailings-interviews-available

3. Most comments on the anthrax attacks in this essay are based on my book, *The 2001 Anthrax Deception: The Case for a Domestic Conspiracy*. Clarity Press, 2014.

https://www.claritypress.com/MacQueen.html

But see also FBI whistleblower Richard Lambert's lawsuit, paragraphs 50 ff.:

https://archive.org/stream/RichardLambertLawsuit2015/FBI%20Agent%20Richard%20Lambert%20Lawsuit%20%282015%29%20concerning%20Anthrax%20investigations%20of%202001_djvu.txt

4. For examples of false flags, see the collection by Washington's blog:

https://www.globalresearch.ca/53-admitted-false-flag-attacks/5432931

5. The Wounded Flesh Stratagem can be found at least as early as the 14th century CE in the novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Yan Yi*). It can also be found as one among many stratagems in the later compilation, *Thirty-six Stratagems*. The Wikipedia article on the latter text offers an interpretative translation of *ku rou ji*: "inflict injury on oneself to win the enemy's trust". If the pipe bomb case is an instance of *ku rou ji*, the enemy of the perpetrators would be the U.S. population itself.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-Six_Stratagems

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