

Psychological Warfare and the “False Flag” Meme

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False flag operations and assassinations are a central component of the elaborate psychological warfare campaign waged on the American public to justify the so-called “global war on terrorism,” and the events of September 11, 2001 are this project’s cornerstone.

Major US news outlets turn a blind eye to a wide array of evidence “that Western covert operators were behind” events such as “Bali, Madrid, London 7/7, mosque bombings in Iraq and elsewhere and, of course, 9/11. Because the mainstream media are integral to the Industrial Military Academic Intelligence Media complex,” journalist Barrie Zwicker observes, “the cold-blooded technicians of death face no journalistic scrutiny. Without moral, legal, technical or financial constraints, the black operators range freely, executing the orders of the global oligarchies.”[1]

An undeniable effect of the Boston Marathon bombing was that the term “false flag”—meaning a typically illegal act carried out by a government against itself that is often blamed on another entity to justify its own policies—became a recognizable expression among a broader swath of the American public. For example, web-based searches for the phrase spiked in the wake of the April 15 event after a correspondent for the alternative news site Infowars questioned Massachusetts Governor Duval Patrick on the suspicious circumstances surrounding the bombing.[2] Some news outlets predictably moved to condemn any cogitation along these lines as “conspiracy theorizing.”[3]

In the United States the citizenry is especially well-indoctrinated through an overwhelming dependence on such corporate media. Yet for the peoples of many countries “false flag” has become a commonplace term. This is particularly so in the Middle East, where journalists and the broader public routinely witness inexplicable terror attacks on civilian populations. Placed in a broader historical context there is a concurrent understanding of such tactics as emblematic of military and intelligence-related meddling from Western nations.

For example, in the early 2000s waves of car bombings throughout Iraq were rumored to have been carried out by British or US intelligence. “The word on the street in Baghdad is that the cessation of suicide car bombings is proof that the CIA was behind them,” independent journalist Dahr Jamail wrote in 2004. “Why? Because as one man states, ‘[CIA agents are] too busy fighting now, and the unrest they wanted to cause by the bombings is now upon them.’ True or not, it doesn’t bode well for the occupiers’ image in Iraq.”[4]

Along these lines, in September 2005 Iraqi police arrested two British soldiers disguised in conventional Iraqi jallabajs [loose cloaks] and Arab headscarves after the costumed pair reportedly drove a car equipped with explosives while opening fire on Iraqi police. British armed forces then used several tanks and helicopters to liberate the masquerading combatants from the police barracks where they were detained.[5]

Similar to NATO's Operation Gladio, or the FBI's more recent efforts at generating newsworthy terrorist incidents in the US,[6] such black operations designed to cultivate terrorism were in fact authorized by the United States in 2002 to further perpetuate its "war on terror." At that time military officials established the "Proactive, Preemptive Operations Group (P2OG)." P2OG's overall strategy combined "CIA and military covert action, information warfare, intelligence and cover and deception" to execute terrorist acts on civilian populations in order to provoke and respond to such consequent indigenous terrorism.[7] In other words, this was an elaborate and deadly "make work" program by and for the military and intelligence communities.

With the above in mind, it is perhaps little wonder that "false flag" has become a standard term in the discourse of non-Western and especially Middle Eastern news outlets. Conversely, the expression is either absent from US-based news media, or carefully neutralized in editorial commentary and lighter entertainment or lifestyle-related coverage.

LexisNexis news searches for the dates April 15, 2004 to April 15, 2014 yields 1,012 newspaper items and more than 100 broadcast transcripts where "false flag" is used in the headline or text. An overwhelming majority of references appear in Pakistani and Iranian newspaper coverage and commentary, where the term is almost uniformly intended to denote instances of terrorist violence.

BBC Monitoring International Reports-52

Press TV (Iran)-51

Pakistan Observer-42

The Frontier Post (Pakistan)-28

The Nation (Thailand)-24

The Washington Post-20

Mail Online-19

The New York Times-18

McClatchey Tribune Syndicate-17

International New York Times-16

Mehr News Agency (Iran)-15

National Post (Canada)-15

The Washington Times-15

Daily News (Sri Lanka)-14

The Jerusalem Post-14

Daily Times (Pakistan)-13

Gold Coast Publications (Australia)-13

Sunday Times (Islamabad)-13

The Augusta Chronicle-12

FARS News Agency (Iran)-11

The Times (London)-10

The Guardian (London)-10

News Outlets and instances of "false flag" referenced in news and opinion articles or broadcast transcriptions, April 15, 2004 to April 15, 2014

"The Mumbai attacks indeed have been used to scuttle the composite dialogue bringing Pakistan under pressure, accusing it of abetting terror" an opinion piece in Thailand's *Nation* reads. "Simultaneously, only days after a warning of an Israeli 'false flag' bombing against the US as being 'in the works', a car bomb is discovered in Time[s] Square!"[8]

Indeed, the false flag meme is routinely deployed in a wide swath of global news discourse, the top ones of which are listed above. A cross section of contextual usages from Middle Eastern-based publications is presented below.

“The way [Osama bin Laden] was hastily buried under mysterious circumstances gave rise to speculations that it was a false flag operation to undermine Pak[istan’s] Army, Air Force and ISI and to defame Pakistan,” states an analysis in Pakistan’s Frontier Post.[9]

False flag operations are covert operations designed to deceive the public at large. During Algeria[’s] civil war and struggle for independence [the] French government had resorted to similar tactics to crush the freedom movement. Some investigating journalists and organizations had also described [the] 9/11 attacks as false flag operations conducted by the CIA, Mossad and the RAW to take on the Muslim world ... Israel is known for such operations, as it deliberately attacked the USS Liberty with unmarked fighters and torpedo boats causing 174 American casualties in an attempt to blame Egypt and garner American support during [the] 1967 war.–Pakistan Observer[10]

The news claiming that Iran has launched a cyber attack on US banks is a sheer lie and an obvious false flag operation. With US President Barack Obama ready to sign an executive order to control the Internet in the name of cybersecurity, could it be more obvious that this ‘cyber attack’ is a total setup? ... US news website Infowars reported.–FARS News Agency (Iran) [11]

Whenever and wherever a blood-dimmed tide is loosened in Pakistan, the government blames Al Qaeda or Taliban for it. What the people have witnessed at Rawalpindi is yet another false flag operation perpetrated by a group that has some ulterior motives for creating such turmoil. For their personal benefits they are sowing the wind without realising that they would ultimately harvest a hurricane.–The Nation (Thailand)[12]

On January 13th 2012, Mark Perry broke a story in Foreign Policy magazine, in which he laid bare a false flag operation that Israel’s Mossad ran for several years. It involved their agents posing as CIA operatives in London and contracting the new infamous Jundullah (Iran), to conduct cross-border terrorism from Pakistan into Iran.–Daily Times (Pakistan)[13]

However, Damascus categorically rejected the baseless claim, and announced later that the chemical attack had actually been carried out by the militants themselves as a false flag operation.–PressTV (Iran)[14]

On the other hand, the degree and nature of the idiom’s usage in US news outlets is telling. Indeed, to forthrightly discuss false flag operations as the above items do is to render them useless as psychological techniques. The term is thus almost entirely absent in US-based broadcast (ABC, CBS NBC, Fox, NPR) and cable news programming transcripts (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News). It is invoked a total five times over the past ten years on Fox News programs—three of which focus on University of Wisconsin Arabic Studies instructor Kevin Barrett, who was subjected to a relentless media frenzy for publicly questioning the US government’s explanation of September 11, 2001.[15]

MSNBC host Rachel Maddow references “false flag,” in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing, focusing on Infowars’ coverage of the event.[16] The phrase also appears in an ABC transcript of a 2011 George Stephanopoulos interview featuring former Minnesota Governor and author Jesse Ventura.[17]

As noted, the term's appearance in major print news media is largely restricted to the editorial, entertainment, and lifestyle sections, with exceptional framing in news coverage generally proving the rule. For example, over the past decade the term appears in 20 items published in the *Washington Post*, yet only five such usages are in reference to primarily non-Western military or intelligence-related concerns, with the remainder involving editorial comment on politics and entertainment reviews or event listings, a few of which obliquely reference the Boston Marathon bombing aftermath. "But there are a few bold, determined [Republican congresspersons] who may rescue Obamacare," Michael Gerson writes. "If I were prone to conspiracy theories, I'd suspect a false-flag operation. Since I'm not, there must be explanations that arise from within tea party ideology." [18]

"[A] top [Iranian] Revolutionary Guard officer named Brig. Gen. Ali Reza Asgari vanished in Istanbul," the *Post* reports. "The betting among spy buffs is that Asgari was recruited in what's known as a "false flag" operation. His handlers may be Israelis posing as officers of another intelligence service, perhaps even during the debriefing." [19]

Another reference to "false flag" is used in describing the untimely demise of one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's former associates.

Before he died, [Alexander] Litvinenko blamed his impending demise on Putin, whose enemies tend to meet untimely deaths. Litvinenko was said to be on the verge of obtaining documents — or maybe they were already in his possession; this part is unclear — proving that Putin had staged attacks on Russian civilians and made it look as if Chechen separatists were responsible so that Putin would then be free to wage a brutal war of suppression against the Chechens. In the secret world, this sort of gambit is called a "false flag" operation. [20]

As noted, only one deployment of the term in the *Washington Post* since 2004 is in relation to US, British or Israeli covert practices, and here the exception indeed proves the censorial rule, for it is referenced in reportage describing sanctioned interrogation practices for Guantanamo detainees.

"[US Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld then asked a working group of lawyers, intelligence officials and representatives of the Office of Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict to come up with permanent interrogation guidelines for Guantanamo," the *Post* reports.

They looked at 35 techniques, including covering a suspect with wet towels to simulate drowning, and stripping detainees. Only 24 techniques survived, the result of a rancorous debate. Seven of those approved techniques are not included in U.S. military doctrine, and are listed as: "change of scenery up; change of scenery down; dietary manipulation; environmental manipulation; sleep adjustment (reversal) ; isolation for 30 days"; and a technique known as "false flag," or deceiving a detainee into believing he is being interrogated by someone from another country. [21]

Usage of the term in the even more influential *New York Times* follows a similar course. Four of the eighteen *Times* articles referencing "false flag" involve coverage of the episode in early 2010 when cyber-attacks against Google and other US-based corporations were traced to Chinese military and educational institutions. *Times* reporters cited speculations by western industry and government officials that Chinese "schools were cover for a 'false flag'

intelligence operation being run by a third country.”[22] “Security experts caution that it is hard to trace online attacks and that the digital footprints may be a ‘false flag,’” the *Times* instructs in a follow-up story, “a kind of decoy intended to throw investigators off track.”[23]

Seven *New York Times* articles are found in the editorial, entertainment, or style sections and deal with the term in an expectedly playful and detached manner. For example, one writer addressing the topic of “conspiracy theories” remarks that “in recent years, it seems as if every tragedy comes with a round of yarn-spinning, as the Web fills with stories about ‘false flag’ attacks and crisis actors’ — not mere theorizing but arguments for the existence of a completely alternate version of reality.”[24]

Aside from the episode involving China’s would-be involvement in cyber-terrorism, only once does the *Times* employ the “false flag” phrase in the context of serious international news coverage—a somewhat depreciative story profiling Mother Agnes Mariam published in the wake of the 2013 chemical attacks on Syrian civilians. “When Russia’s foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, wanted to bolster his argument that rebels had carried out the poison gas attacks near Damascus on Aug. 21,” the *Times* reports,

he pointed to the work of a 61-year-old Lebanese-born nun, [Mother Agnes Mariam of the Cross,] who had concluded that the horrifying videos showing hundreds of dead and choking victims, including many children, had been fabricated ahead of time to provide a pretext for foreign intervention ... Through conversations with Syrians and clergy throughout the country, she said, she uncovered [sic] “the false flag of the Arab Spring.” Instead of a popular uprising by citizens enraged by economic stagnation and political oppression, she said, she found a conspiracy cooked up by international powers to destroy Syria.[25]

The UK *Guardian* and *Times* of London each reference “false flag” ten times over the past decade, with articles equally apportioned between editorials (four), news stories (three), and entertainment or style pieces (three). Only a few of these relate the term to the methods of Anglo-American empire.

For instance, a *Guardian* article from 2006 sneeringly reviews a lecture on 9/11 by Professor David Ray Griffin who, alongside other “conspiracy theorists,” maintains “[t]he attacks ... were not carried out by al-Qaida [sic] but were a ‘false flag’ event used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.”[26]

The *Times* notably includes a report (buried on page 39 of the print edition) on Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan’s March 2014 censorship of YouTube after a recorded conversation between the NATO country’s top government officials was posted on the site. In the discussion “a false flag attack on Turkey” was considered as a pretext to move against “an al-Qaeda splinter group that controls sections of northern Syria bordering Turkey.”[27]

The above suggests how, much like the taboo topic of “conspiracy theories,” US news media broadly reject the subject of false flag terror as the stuff delusion or otherwise perceive it as being mainly restricted to fictional narratives. Indeed, within the acceptable parameters of public discourse such things are, quite literally, unspeakable. If one accepts the basis for reality established in corporate media outlets like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, or their broadcast counterparts, the only strategies and policies deemed worthy of notice

almost entirely take place in the clear light of day. This is because, the theory goes, we live in a democratic society where the public is adequately represented and its interests genuinely well-articulated.

Yet nations and peoples routinely impacted by false flag terror unequivocally recognize the phenomenon as a legitimate item of public knowledge and discussion. Here western doctrinal institutions entrusted to define acceptable discourse and opinion, not to mention forging the accepted historical record, do so to expressly mislead those who unwittingly pay for false flag terror and military aggression abroad— chiefly the American citizenry.

Despite a series of momentous political assassinations in the 1960s with proven government complicity alongside unmistakable “false flag” events such as the Tonkin Gulf incident, the USS Liberty, the 1995 Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building bombing and the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, the above suggests the conscious and now-standard use of psychological warfare methods to contain most Americans’ political horizons and understandings, thereby perpetuating the broader geopolitical status quo.

Notes

[1] Barrie Zwicker, *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-up of 9/11*, Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2006, 2, 3.

[2] Adan Salazar, “[‘What’s a “False Flag”?’ Google Trends Show Search Term Spike](#),” *Infowars.com*, April 18, 2013.

[3] Meghan Keneally, “[Conspiracy Theorists Claim Boston Was ‘False Flag’ Attack Arranged by the Government](#),” *Daily Mail*, April 16, 2013; Rachel Maddow, “The Rachel Maddow Show for April 24, 2013,” MSNBC, April 24, 2013; “[Infowars Confrontation: Boston Resident Blasts Dan Bidondi Over Marathon Bombing Conspiracy Theories](#),” *Huffington Post*, April 30, 2013.

[4] Dahr Jamail, “Dahr Jamail Blog From Baghdad,” *The New Standard*, April 20, 2004. Retrieved April 23, 2014 from <http://www.countercurrents.org/iraq-jamail200404.htm>

[5] Michel Chossudovsky, “[British Undercover Soldiers Caught Driving Booby Trapped Car](#),” *Global Research*, September 20, 2005.

[6] Daniele Ganser, *NATO’s Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe*, London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005; Trevor Aaronson, *The Terror Factory: Inside the FBI’s Manufactured War on Terrorism*, New York: Ig Publishing, 2013. The American press has afforded almost no news coverage or commentary to Gladio, even though the US has figured centrally in subverting the political process in European countries since 1948. See James F. Tracy, “[False Flag Terror and Conspiracies of Silence](#),” *Global Research*, August 10, 2012.

[7] David Isenberg, “[P2OG Allows Pentagon to Fight Dirty](#),” *Asia Times*, November 5, 2002.

[8] S. M. Hali, “Too Many Coincidences!” *The Nation* (Thailand), May 11, 2010.

[9] Asif Haroon Raja, “Uproar Over Leaked Abbottabad Commission Report,” *The Frontier Post*, August 7, 2013.

[10] Mohammad Jamil, “False Flag Operation & Subterfuge,” *Pakistan Observer*, January 12, 2010.

- [11] "US Website: Iran's Cyber Attack on US Banks Obvious False Flag," FARS News Agency, October 3, 2012.
- [12] Ghulam Asghar Khan, "Rendezvous with Death," *The Nation* (Thailand), January 1, 2008.
- [13] Fundy Kasuri, "How Terrorists Fund Their Activities," *Daily Times*, November 21, 2013.
- [14] "[Iran Warns Against Military Intervention in Syria](#)," PressTV, August 27, 2013.
- [15] See, for example, Bill O'Reilly, "[Impact: Update on UW Professor](#)," Fox News, October 11, 2006.
- [16] Maddow, "The Rachel Maddow Show for April 24, 2013."
- [17] George Stephanopoulos, "[Secret Government Documents; Former Governor Speaks Out](#)," ABC News Transcript, April 4, 2011.
- [18] Michael Gerson, "[A Custer for Our Time](#)," *Washington Post*, August 2, 2013, A15.
- [19] Michael Ignatius, "15 Britons in a Sea of Intrigue," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2007, A17.
- [20] Eugene Robinson, "The Case of the Poisoned Spy," *Washington Post*, November 28, 2006, A19.
- [21] Dana Priest and Bradley Graham, "[Guantanamo List Details Approved Interrogation Methods](#)," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2004, A13.
- [22] John Markoff and David Barboza, "[2 China Schools Said to Be Tied to Online Attacks](#)," *New York Times*, February 18, 2010.
- [23] David Barboza, "[Hacking Inquiry Puts China's Elite in New Light](#)," *New York Times*, February 22, 2010, A1.
- [24] Maggie Koerth-Baker, "[Why Rational People Buy Into Conspiracy Theories](#)," *New York Times Magazine*, May 26, 2013, 15.
- [25] Ben Hubbard, "[A Nun Lends a Voice of Skepticism on the Use of Poison Gas by Syria](#)," *New York Times*, September 22, 2013, A11.
- [26] Audrey Gillan, "[Full House as Leading 9/11 Conspiracy Theorist Has His Say](#)," *Guardian* (London), September 9, 2006.
- [27] Alexander Christie-Miller, "Erdogan Blocks YouTube Over Leaked War Plans," *Times* (London), March 28, 2014, 39.

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