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U.S. special forces wage secretive 'small wars' against terrorists

<https://archive.is/HVTJJ>

President Barack Obama is increasingly calling upon Special Operations forces to carry out so-called "small wars" across the Middle East and Africa to challenge both ISIS and al Qaeda in places where the U.S. maintains a footprint beyond Syria and Iraq.

In his first trip overseas since taking command of U.S. Special Operations a month ago, Gen. Raymond Thomas told a Middle Eastern audience recently that "complex" fails to adequately describe the current security environment. That complexity is leading the Obama administration to expand the use of small teams of Special Operators in various terror hotspots.

Thomas previously served as head of the secretive Joint Special Operations Command -- the unit that includes Navy SEALs, the Army's Delta Force and other covert Special Operations units.

"We are attempting to identify opportunities to expand [Special Operations'] global presence, forward access and relationships to leverage opportunities short of crisis," Thomas said.

He did not offer additional details, but many military officials privately have noted that ISIS came to power and began controlling large swathes of territory, posing a major terror threat, faster than the U.S. could respond. They don't want to see it happen again.

That explains why -- although much of the U.S. response is clearly focused on Iraq and Syria -- Special Ops forces are being asked to prevent both ISIS and al Qaeda from gaining a stronger foothold in places like Libya, Somalia and Yemen. The military characterizes many of the operations as "advising and assisting" local forces with intelligence and overhead surveillance to help identify targets. But in reality there are also many instances of the U.S. conducting direct attack operations on terror targets.

Among the places where "small war" activities are underway:

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US officials in Belgium to promote intelligence-sharing

<https://archive.is/pOC4i>

A U.S. government delegation is in Belgium to promote greater intelligence-sharing by Belgian and European authorities in the wake of the March suicide bombings that killed 32 victims here, the group's members said Tuesday.

Lisa Monaco, assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism, said "what we have learned in the hard work that we did and continue to do after 9/11 is the importance of sharing information, both across our services as well as rapidly with our international partners."

Monaco said she will meet at U.S. President Barack Obama's request Wednesday with Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, and that meetings are also planned with security services and other Belgian agencies on how to cooperate better in the fight against the Islamic State extremist group.

"The only way we are going to be effective ... is if we work together in partnership," Monaco said.

The March 22 bombings in Brussels, as well as attacks also claimed by IS that killed 130 victims in Paris on Nov. 13, revealed numerous shortcomings in Belgium's response, including breakdowns in communication between law enforcement agencies and with other nations.

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The FBI Is Keeping 80,000 Secret Files on the Saudis and 9/11

<https://archive.is/1Vj5S>

The secret '28 pages' are just the start. The FBI has another 80,000 classified documents, many of which deal with Saudi connections to the 9/11 terror plot. What's the Bureau got?

The Obama administration may soon release 28 classified pages from a congressional investigation that allegedly links Saudis in the United States to the 9/11 attackers. A former Republican member of the 9/11 Commission alleged Thursday that there was "clear evidence" of support for the hijackers from Saudi officials.

But in Florida, a federal judge is weighing whether to declassify portions of some 80,000 classified pages that could reveal far more about the hijackers' Saudi connections and their activities in the weeks preceding the worst attack on U.S. soil.

The still-secret files speak to one of the strangest and most enduring mysteries of the 9/11 attacks. Why did the Saudi occupants of a posh house in gated community in Sarasota, Florida, suddenly vanish in the two weeks prior to the attacks? And had they been in touch with the leader of the operation, Mohamed Atta, and two of his co-conspirators?

No way, the FBI says, even though the bureau's own agents did initially suspect the family was linked to some of the hijackers. On further scrutiny, those connections proved unfounded, officials now say.

But a team of lawyers and investigative journalists has found what they say is hard evidence pointing in the other direction. Atta did visit the family before he led 18 men to their deaths and murdered 3,000 people, they say, and phone records connect the house to members of the 9/11 conspiracy.

The FBI did initially suspect something was off when their agents descended on the Sarasota house shortly after the attacks, tipped off by suspicious neighbors who had always found the family aloof.

Investigators found signs that the occupants had left in a hurry. Food was left on the counter and the refrigerator was stocked. Toys were still floating in the backyard swimming pool. Dirty diapers were left in a bathroom. It also looked like the people who lived there weren't coming back. The mail was piling up outside, and the door to an empty safe was wide open. Three cars remained parked in the garage and driveway.

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Split Decision on NYPD's X-ray Vans

A state appeals court said the NYPD doesn't have to tell the public about how it has used X-ray vans to detect explosives or how much they cost. But it does have to tell them about radiation risks.

<https://archive.is/geFee>

A state appeals court today ordered the New York City Police Department to release information on the health risks of the unmarked X-ray vans that it uses to covertly detect explosives.

But the panel overturned a lower court's ruling that required the department to disclose records on when and where the vans had been used, its policies on van usage, or how much the vans cost, agreeing with the NYPD that concerns over terrorism outweighed the public interest.

For the past four years, ProPublica has sought information about the secretive NYPD counterterrorism program that uses the vans equipped with X-ray machines. The vans can drive alongside vehicles or buildings to find organic materials such as drugs and explosives that may be hidden inside.

But because the vans use backscatter X-rays, which bounce back from the target to create an image, they may also expose unknowing drivers, passengers and pedestrians to ionizing radiation, which can increase the risk of cancer. The X-ray vans are similar to the airport body scanners that were removed by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration over privacy concerns in 2013.

The NYPD has refused to release any records about how it uses the vans and what it does to protect people who may be in the vicinity. Until ProPublica's lawsuit, the police department had never said anything publicly about them other than to confirm their existence.

In 2015, state Supreme Court Judge Doris Ling-Cohan said the NYPD's argument amounted to "mere speculation" and was "patently insufficient" to outweigh the public's right to know. But in its decision today, the appeals court largely agreed with the NYPD's argument that releasing the information would "hamper NYPD's counterterrorism operations and increase the likelihood of another terrorist attack."

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DARPA Shows Off Technology at Demo Day

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Dozens of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency program managers, researchers and engineers descended upon the Pentagon May 11 to show off new technology.

DARPA Director Arati Prabhakar said the goal of the agency's demo day is to get the agency's breakthrough technology in front of the right people.

"Today is the day that we bring some of those crazy technologies out here into the Pentagon so that we can get them in front of our customers and our partners, people across all the military services and across DoD," she told reporters.

With 60 program managers at the event, Prabhakar said they would be engaging with Defense Department officials to set up links and work on accelerating the transition of the programs into formal acquisitions.

One important area of research is in biological technologies, Prabhakar said. DARPA's newest office — the biological technologies office — was stood up two years ago and does work in infectious diseases, synthetic biology and neurotechnologies.

"DARPA has been working in biological technologies for now close to two decades but we felt it was an important time to put a special focus there," she said. "This is one of the areas of research where the pot is bubbling and when you see the pace of research and the pace of the underlying technologies that affect biology that tells us that surprise is going to come from this year and we want to make sure that we understand that and help drive it."

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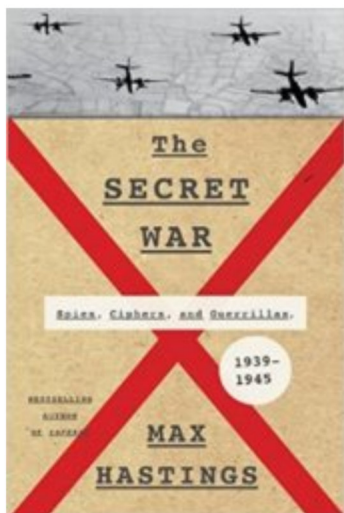


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The Secret War: Spies, Ciphers, and Guerrillas, 1939-1945

From one of the foremost historians of the period and the acclaimed author of *Inferno* and *Catastrophe: 1914*, *The Secret War* is a sweeping examination of one of the most important yet underexplored aspects of World War II—intelligence—showing how espionage successes and failures by the United States, Britain, Russia, Germany, and Japan influenced the course of the war and its final outcome.

Spies, codes, and guerrillas played unprecedentedly critical roles in the Second World War, exploited by every nation in the struggle to gain secret knowledge of its foes, and to sow havoc behind the fronts. In *The Secret War*, Max Hastings presents a worldwide cast of characters and some extraordinary sagas of intelligence and resistance, to create a new perspective on the greatest conflict in history.

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