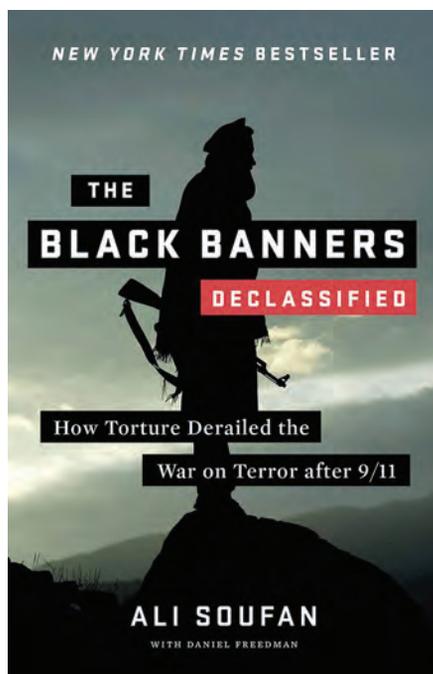


eventually, reckoning. And while he does hold Rumsfeld and Cheney chiefly responsible for the events that befell the United States before and after the start of the war, he also realizes that limiting the discussion to this timeframe does not fully address the scope of the tragedy. The mistake to invade Iraq, as Mazarr sees it, has many fathers: a national security process driven by consensus over debate, a foreign policy that under-resources diplomacy, a media swayed by jingoistic arguments for war, and many others. Mazarr struggles to find discernment, and its practice, in American society.

Leap of Faith deserves a place on the bookshelf of every leader in the joint force and the National security policy community, alongside *Cobra II*, *The Assassin's Gate*, *To Start a War*, and the U.S. Army's recent retrospective volumes on the conflict to round out a full appreciation of the Iraq War. What Mazarr provides, and most other books on this subject do not, are several policy recommendations intended to provide alternative perspectives on international crises to senior leaders, keep pathways for discourse open, and prevent the overstepping of bounds within the inter-agency community and its collaborative processes. Although not all suggestions may be implemented, they come from a logically sound place and deserve further consideration. Mazarr realizes the difference between a horror movie and foreign policy decisionmaking. Here we can talk to the audience.

Here we can say, "Don't go in there." JFQ

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The Black Banners (Declassified): How Torture Derailed the War on Terror After 9/11

By Ali Soufan, with Daniel Freedman
W.W. Norton & Company, 2020
594 pp. \$17.95 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-0393343496

Reviewed by Bryon Greenwald

This declassified/unredacted version of Ali Soufan's 2011 edition of *Black Banners* is a must-read for anyone interested in terrorism, the psychology of interrogation, bureaucratic politics, and the lessons of poor leadership. Soufan demonstrates how dysfunctional U.S. intelligence services were before and after 9/11. He also demolishes the argument for the enhanced interrogation—or torture techniques—authorized by the George W. Bush administration and championed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). *Black Banners* ranks with Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars* and Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower* as key sources for understanding al Qaeda.

Soufan presents a personal account of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s detective work that went into

uncovering attacks by al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Although the book is generally chronological, Soufan weaves a tight narrative and freely jumps forward or backward in time to connect key events. A Lebanese American fluent in Arabic, Soufan joined the FBI on a bet with his college fraternity brothers; the United States is lucky he did. As Lawrence Wright notes, "Unfortunately, we have only one Ali Soufan. Had American intelligence listened to him, 9/11 might never have happened."

On that subject, Soufan is unsparing. The CIA knew in January 2000 that al Qaeda operatives, including two eventual 9/11 hijackers, had met in Malaysia. The CIA stated that "they knew nothing" when the FBI asked about this meeting in November 2000, April 2001, and July 2001. The CIA did not notify the FBI, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, or the Department of State that those hijackers also possessed U.S. visas. Thus, these men were not on any watch lists. They entered the United States and used their real names to get driver's licenses, open bank accounts, and buy tickets for American Airlines Flight 77, the airliner they later crashed into the Pentagon.

After 9/11, the lack of team play continued, as the CIA exerted new Presidential authority to interrogate terrorism suspects. Unfortunately, the CIA had mothballed its interrogation program and, according to Soufan, had no institutional expertise. Instead, the agency hired two contractors, James Mitchell and John Jessen, who claimed they could get detainees to "talk" by applying an ever-increasing menu of harsh techniques. The CIA paid them \$81 million, although they had never previously interrogated anyone or met an Islamic radical. That the Department of Justice and the White House sanctioned these techniques, even after Soufan proved them ineffective, signaled how seriously 9/11 traumatized the American policy apparatus and drove it to search for easy, if wrong, answers.

In newly declassified chapters, Soufan provides evidence of this trauma. In March 2002, the CIA asked Soufan to assist in interrogating Abu Zubaydah, the first high-level detainee captured by

the United States. While not a member of al Qaeda, Zubaydah was an important terrorist facilitator. The CIA captured Zubaydah, disguised and wounded, in a shoot-out. Initially, the agency could not identify him and did not dispatch any interrogators. When Soufan arrived in Thailand to assist, a CIA officer remarked that “We all work for Uncle Sam” and let Soufan question Zubaydah without the agency’s support.

Soufan began not by causing Zubaydah pain, but by calling him by the nickname his mother had given him, which quickly convinced Zubaydah to cooperate. Within an hour, Zubaydah confessed to an ongoing plot. Soufan relayed that information to CIA headquarters, which thwarted the attack. Surprised at how fast Zubaydah cooperated, CIA Director George Tenet wanted to congratulate his agents. When told the CIA team was absent and that Soufan had obtained the intelligence, Tenet was furious and ordered his team to take over.

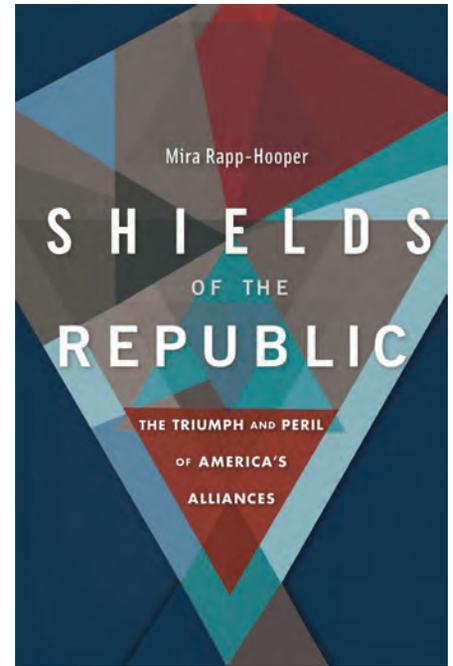
Meanwhile, after a James Bond–worthy undercover trip to get Zubaydah to a hospital for lifesaving treatment, Soufan’s rapport-building paid off as Zubaydah identified a photograph of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, verified his al Qaeda position, and credited him as the mastermind behind 9/11. When Mitchell took over, he stripped Zubaydah, exposed him to loud rock music, and kept him awake for 24 hours. Each time Zubaydah was instructed to “tell me what you know,” he was silent or asked, “What do you want to know?” After multiple failures, the CIA asked Soufan to restart the interrogation, which he did with notable success. But confirmation bias and bureaucratic zeal prevailed: Mitchell received new authorization for what were clearly experiments—not proven techniques—that included extended sleep deprivation, coffin confinement, and waterboarding. Zubaydah, who had trained to withstand worse, revealed nothing or simply lied to stop the torture.

Lying also enabled the torture to continue. The CIA falsely touted its techniques, claimed credit for intelligence Soufan unearthed, and knowingly issued incorrect information. Despite

intelligence to the contrary, the CIA and the White House claimed that Zubaydah was the number 3 man in al Qaeda, but he was never a member. The CIA also maintained that after 30 to 45 seconds of waterboarding, Zubaydah gave up Jose Padilla, the supposed mastermind behind a plot to use a dirty bomb in an American city. In fact, the CIA waterboarded Zubaydah 83 times and obtained no new useful information. Zubaydah also confided that Padilla was not clever enough to mastermind anything. His supposed “plan” was to steal uranium from a hospital and swing it around his head in a bucket to enrich it. Perhaps most egregious was how the Bush administration linked Padilla, nuclear material, and Saddam Hussein together as it built a case to invade Iraq.

Some memoirists engage in self-delusion as to the value of their contributions. Soufan does not. Honestly written and corroborated by independent investigations into the torture of detainees, *Black Banners* is an extremely open, engaging history. It is essential reading for those who want to understand how al Qaeda and similar organizations operate, why torture does not work, and how ego and self-interest can cause leaders and those around them to abandon their principles. JFQ

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Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances

By Mira Rapp-Hooper
Harvard University Press, 2020
272 pp. \$27.95
ISBN: 978-0674982956

Reviewed by James J. Townsend, Jr.

The timing of Dr. Mira Rapp-Hooper’s book, *Shields of the Republic*, could not be better. In my many years as a civil servant in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, I would spend the first year of most new administrations explaining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the incoming political appointees. Democrat or Republican, old Pentagon hand or neophyte, most knew something of NATO, but they arrived with some preconceived notions that were way off. That said, by the end of an administration, we usually had some real NATO pros among the appointees. Unfortunately, after a new administration took office, we would have to start all over again with the new batch.

Today, however, all my successor must do is hand *Shields of the Republic* to the new Biden appointees and walk away.