

UNLEASHING MY INNER JIHADI

A GEOPOLITICAL MEMOIR

GEOFFREY DUTTON



DoD photo by Master Sgt. Ken Hammond, U.S. Air Force, from Wikimedia¹

For a big, strapping nation like the United States of America to be obsessively fixated on foreign-born evildoers is really quite strange, especially given that it has so many of its own. Other than 9/11, all terror attacks in the US since 2000 that weren't thwarted or aborted involved firearms. Even if you include mass shootings that didn't receive the Government's Terrorism imprimatur, how many mass killings can you cite that were committed by undocumented aliens or foreign infiltrators?

Not that there aren't foreigners who have bones to pick with America. According to Statista², nearly 200,000 Iraqi civilians lost their lives due to the US invasion, the ensuing resistance, and subsequent conflicts with ISIS invaders. From the start of the Iraq War in 2003 under GW Bush to his exit from office in 2009, 105,000 Iraqi civilians were killed, peaking at nearly 30,000 in 2006. During Obama's first term, civilian deaths totaled 93,300, hovering at less than 5000 per year.

When ISIS stormed into Iraq in 2012, deaths escalated; 20,000 in 2014, remaining above 13,000 until steeply declining to 2500 in 2017. US Military deaths for those 15 years totaled 4541, peaking at 904 in 2007. Overall, 44 Iraqi noncombatants fell for every American soldier who died there. This is the so-called Price of Liberty, paid by innocent Iraqis, traumatized veterans, bereaved military families, and American taxpayers, at the further cost of eternal vigilance over everyone by our intelligence agencies.

Due to foreign forces and internal conflicts, by 2016 5.5 million Syrians had fled their homes, as did 2.5M Afghani citizens. As of 2017, Turkey had admitted 3.4M Syrians. By 2016 Germany had received 100,500 Syrian asylum seekers, while only 1540 were admitted into the US. Within Syria, by 2017, 23% of the housing stock had been damaged and more than half of working age adults were unemployed³. Although the US did not cause this situation, it certainly intensified it, having motivated assorted foreign jihadis to coalesce there in expectation of creating a caliphate.

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It's hard to deny that America is a violent nation. Glossing over that inconvenient truth are official and self-appointed apologists, eager to point fingers at criminal elements and foreign evildoers. But the sad fact they belie is that the perps of the vast majority of shootings are homegrown resentful gun-happy white men, most without criminal records.

Know that the United States enjoys a near-monopoly in gun violence. Constituting 4.4% of the world's population, its residents own 42% of all civilian-owned guns (of 644 M worldwide). In 2012, the US enjoyed 29.6 homicides from firearms per million people. The closest runner-up, Switzerland, had 7.7 per M, while our Canadian cousins had a rate of 5.1.

Also know that since 9/11, there has been only one case of mass murder in the US that officially bears the label of terrorism—the 2016 massacre at a Christmas party at a social service agency in San Bernardino, CA that left 14 dead and 22 injured. Both suspects, one of whom was a native US citizen and the other a legal alien, died in a shootout with police the same day⁴.

That this couple, along with Nidal Hasan and Omar Mateen, the 2009 Fort Hood Texas shooter and the Orlando Pulse nightclub shooter, respectively, were Muslims with Middle Eastern roots only served to fan the flames of Islamophobia, even though the US Government

declined to designate either Hasan or Mateen as terrorists. (Hasan couldn't be tried by a military tribunal for terrorism, while Mateen's actions were attributed to homophobia.)

They were all loonies, right? Yet, a study in the American Journal of Public Health found that databases that track gun homicides show that people with a diagnosed mental illness committed less than 5 percent of 120,000 gun-related killings in America from 2001 to 2010⁵. In any event, that mass shootings are rare events makes coming up with effective mental health regulations challenging. Gun violence research shows that the strongest predictors of violence in general include alcohol and drug abuse and a history of domestic violence⁶. Many such incidents may involve undiagnosed mental disturbances that regulators would be unable to screen for.

After a spate of other tragic shootings, especially in public schools, politicians appeared to lean toward denying gun permits to psychologically impaired individuals, not that such regulations are likely. The National Rifle Association has spent \$203.2 million on political activities since 1998. Close to 90% of that was direct spending, while the remainder went to campaign committees, all of it aimed at forestalling any and all gun regulation and weeding out legislators and candidates whom the NRA believes lack sufficient Second Amendment fervor.

Take assault rifles. American civilians collectively own and actively trade between 6 to 10 million AR-15-type semi-automatic rifles. The NRA routinely refers to this style of weapon as “modern sporting rifles” and resists all efforts to rein them in⁷. Besides the gun lobby's resistance, any regulations aimed at suppressing ownership of these weapons would be doomed by the black market—smuggling, Dark Web trading, and 3D printing of increasingly sophisticated firearms, abetted by a lack of enthusiasm on the part of gun-loving law enforcement officers to enforce them.

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So here we have a superpower with its military and its citizenry armed to the teeth, a nation that commits and abets more violent acts than any since WWII (or during it, if we count the firebombing of German and Japanese cities), fearful of terrorism. A nation that defends freedom by arming unsavory autocrats. A nation that has created more terrorists than have ever beset its citizens, with an “intelligence community” that routinely and in some ways unconstitutionally spies on them, all in the name of combatting an exaggerated menace that US military adventures and foreign policies have conjured up.

They all are drunk with power and continue to cow Congress to give them greater resource to expand their capabilities. And now they want to take hegemony into orbit with a Space Force, for crying out loud. What for? To defend our spy Satellites? To block Iran or ISIS from landing on the Moon or Russia from colonizing Mars? And nothing that the American people can say in protest will stop them.

After a decade or more of witnessing gratuitous carnage perpetrated in my name at home and abroad, unchecked lust for military and economic supremacy around the globe, and collateral damages at a scale hard to comprehend, I lost it. I considered most terrorist acts—especially those committed by Islamic jihadists—as blowback, pure and simple, events that wouldn't have taken place but for cruel and unusual punishments visited on Muslim-majority nations with the temerity to reject the decadent imperialism of America and its western allies.

Now, I'm sure there are jihadis who consider all infidels to be fair game, no matter whose flag they live under. Even so, I'm equally sure that America's actions must have strengthened their resolve. Realizing that made me feel both contrite and complicit, and I vowed to take action to purify my soul.

What I did not do was to contact ISIS on Facebook, buy a gun, or round up bomb-making supplies. What I did do was to invent a fictional God-fearing Islamic jihadi, a young Iraqi man cast straight out of Blowback Central⁸. Between what the US-led coalition and then ISIS did to him in Iraq, he has a lot of anger to blow back. To be clear, I wasn't calling for America's destruction; I just wanted my compatriots to get comfortable with the idea that decimating civilians and their infrastructure might just breed a bit of resentment that certain people might act out.

Mahmoud (that's the protagonist's name) understands he can't directly retaliate against the US, but is enticed to join a terrorist conspiracy in Piraeus led by a mysterious Turk. And so, he projects himself across Anatolia to the Aegean coast to float to Greece to partake in a plot that he learns upon arrival will send him back to Turkey. He comes mentally unprepared for such a mission or for the steaming cauldron of chaos that was greater Athens in 2015, where a bitching brew of leftists and ultranationalists pit themselves against the callow Greek government and each other. The more extreme among them plot institutional destruction. The extremist

Mahmoud hooks up with has no small plan; he's targeting the upcoming G-20 meeting in Turkey.

So, let's talk Turkey, which features prominently in the plot. Despite their recent bickering, there's a weird parallel between our current president and theirs, involving power-lust, side deals with cronies, and advancing radically conservative and anti-secularist agendas. Both are happy to help industrialists, moneymen, and the religious right to do what they will; in both lands we see foxes guarding henhouses and dominant religions enforcing their articles of faith. Too, both leaders are truculent, bombastic, and thin-skinned; one takes refuge in his luxurious palace, the other behind a symbolic wall. But, while the US is folding itself into fetal position with regard to alliances, treaties, and trade, Turkey is building bridges to nations the US condemns, like Russia, Iran, and now even Syria. Is Venezuela its next best friend?

Although the novel doesn't dwell on these similarities, many readers will pick up that subtext as Mahmoud and his comrades reshape their mission to Turkey. They pick a new target to dispatch. They eschew firearms and explosives, having decided that the way to his heart is intravenous.

After all is said and done and destinies revealed, the reader may still not be sure whom to root for, the state or the terrorists. It's a tougher choice than one might think, and causes one to ponder what it might take to wrest remnants of democracy from the clenched jaws of tyranny. How, for instance, would you feel about a foreign power that turned its firepower on your community and you had to flee, perhaps never to return, and what might you do about it?

The novel is called *Turkey Shoot*. Find out all about it at perfidy.press.

¹ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11934>

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/269729/documented-civilian-deaths-in-iraq-war-since-2003/>

³ <https://www.statista.com/topics/4216/the-syrian-civil-war/>

⁴ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/10/2/16399418/us-gun-violence-statistics-maps-charts>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4318286/>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21359532/>

⁷ <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/may/18/facts-mass-shootings-guns-united-states/>

⁸ <https://perfidy.press/turkey-shoot/>