

Last Words

Setting aside the question of whether it even makes sense to speak of a "war on terrorism," one thing is for certain: this action represents a once in a generation opportunity for employees of participating agencies to build individual and institutional relationships that will persist for years to come. FBI agents, special forces, intel analysts and their covert counterparts, and even local law enforcement personnel are engaged in a massive meet-and-greet operation, one with real consequences for our nation.

This won't be the first time such a thing has happened. Though dwarfed in scale by the present undertaking, the anti-Castro effort of the early '60s is an instructive case study. That operation brought together active CIA, retired FBI, and a small army of enraged Cuban exiles, and the result was a disaster for our democratic institutions. MK-ULTRA, Watergate, Iran-Contra—any survey of the most appalling incidents of the past thirty years shows the same names appearing again and again. Theodore Shackley, Chi Chi Quintero, Felix Rodriguez—all were veterans of the war on Cuba.

And now history is repeating itself. Our leaders have signaled a willingness to make cause with anyone, no matter how sordid, so long as they give lip service to the struggle. Our generals speak of the need to adopt new tactics, including assassination squads operating covertly in other nations. All levels of law enforcement are pushing for an expansion of police powers, and one-time civil libertarians now make the case for using torture as an interrogation tool. While the majority of the persons involved will resist the temptation to abuse these new techniques, a few will succumb, and these are the individuals who will undoubtedly be at the center of every immoral project undertaken by our government over the next fifty years.

So we might as well start preparing for it. "We, the people" were at a disadvantage the last time around; it took years to build an accurate roster of the players, and many of the most egregious incidents occurred during this period of ignorance. This time, though, we can be ready; towards this end, EoH proposes the creation of a database dedicated to tracking the foot soldiers in the war on terrorism. We need to start cataloging their names and faces, indexing news stories and TV appearances, and filling in the details: where they were posted, who they worked with, that sort of thing. The picture that emerges—a map, if you will, of social networks and institutional alliances—will be invaluable when trying to understand future events, because these people are going to be with us for a long, long time.