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The U.S. Did Not Defeat Fascism in WWII, It Discretely Internationalized It



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

“The U.S. has established itself as the mortal enemy of *all* people’s government, *all* scientific-socialist mobilization of consciousness everywhere on the globe, all anti-imperialist activity on earth.”

– George Jackson

One of the founding myths of the contemporary Western European and American world is that fascism was defeated in WWII by liberal democracies, and particularly by the United States. With the subsequent Nuremberg trials and the patient construction of a liberal world order, a bulwark was erected—in fits and starts, and with the constant threat of regression—against fascism and its evil twin in the East. American culture industries have rehearsed this narrative ad nauseum, brewing it into a saccharine ideological Kool-Aid and piping it into every household, shack and street corner with a TV or smartphone, tirelessly juxtaposing the supreme evil of Nazism to the freedom and prosperity of liberal democracy.

The material record suggests, however, that this narrative is actually based on a false antagonism, and that a paradigm shift is necessary in order to understand the history of actually existing liberalism and fascism. The latter, as we shall see, far from being eradicated

at the end of WWII, was actually repurposed, or rather redeployed, to serve its primary historical function: to destroy godless communism and its threat to the capitalist civilizing mission. Since the colonial projects of Hitler and Mussolini had become so brazen and erratic, as they shifted from playing more or less by the liberal rules of the game to openly breaking them and then running amok, it was understood that the best way to construct the fascist international was to do so under liberal cover, meaning through clandestine operations that maintained a liberal façade. While this probably sounds like hyperbole to those whose understanding of history has been formatted by bourgeois social science, which focuses almost exclusively on visible government and the aforementioned liberal cover, the history of the invisible government of the national security apparatus suggests that fascism, far from being defeated in WWII, was successfully internationalized.

The Architects of the Fascist International

When the United States entered WWII, the future head of the CIA, Allen Dulles, bemoaned that his country was fighting the wrong enemy. The Nazis, as he explained, were pro-capitalist Aryan Christians, whereas the true enemy was godless communism and its resolute anti-capitalism. After all, the U.S. had, only some 20 years prior, been part of a massive military intervention in the U.S.S.R., when fourteen capitalist countries sought—in [the words of Winston Churchill](#)—to “strangle the Bolshevik baby in its crib.” Dulles understood, like many of his colleagues in the U.S. government, that what would later become known as the Cold War was actually the old war, [as Michael Parenti has convincingly argued](#): the one they had been fighting against communism since its inception.

Towards the end of WWII, General Karl Wolff, formerly Himmler’s right-hand man, went to see Allen Dulles in Zurich, where he was working for the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor organization to the CIA. Wolff knew that the war was lost, and he wanted to avoid being brought to justice. Dulles, for his part, wanted the Nazis in Italy under Wolff’s command to lay down their arms against the allies and help the Americans in their fight against communism. Wolff, who was the highest-ranking SS officer to survive the war, offered Dulles the promise of developing, with his Nazi team, an intelligence network against Stalin. It was agreed that the general who had played a central role in overseeing the Nazi’s genocidal machine, and who [expressed](#) his “special joy” when he secured freight trains to send 5,000 Jews a day to Treblinka, would be protected by the future director of the CIA, who helped him avoid the Nuremberg trials.

Wolff was very far from being the only senior Nazi official protected and rehabilitated by the OSS-CIA. The case of Reinhard Gehlen is particularly telling. This general in the Third Reich had been in charge of *Fremde Heere Ost*, the Nazi intelligence service directed against the Soviets. After the war, he was recruited by the OSS-CIA and met with all of the major architects of the postwar National Security State: Allen Dulles, William Donovan, Frank Wisner, President Truman. He was then appointed to head the first German intelligence

service after the war, and he proceeded to employ many of his Nazi collaborators. The Gehlen Organization, as it was known, would become the nucleus of the German intelligence service. It is unclear how many war criminals this decorated Nazi hired, but [Eric Lichtblau estimates](#) that some four thousand Nazi agents were integrated into the network overseen by the American spy agency. With an annual funding of half a million dollars from the CIA in the early years after the war, Gehlen and his strong men were able to act with impunity. [Yvonnick Denoël explained](#) this turnaround with remarkable clarity: “It is hard to understand that, as early as 1945, the army and the US intelligence services recruited without qualms former Nazi criminals. The equation was, however, very simple at the time: the United States had just defeated the Nazis with the help of the Soviets. They henceforth planned to defeat the Soviets with the help of former Nazis.”

The situation was similar in Italy because Dulles’ agreement with Wolff was part of a larger undertaking, called Operation Sunrise, which mobilized Nazis and fascists to end the Second World War in Italy (and begin the Third World War across the globe). Dulles worked hand in hand with the Agency’s future chief counterintelligence officer, James Angleton, who was then stationed by the OSS in Italy. These two men, who would become two of the most powerful political actors of the twentieth century, showed what they were capable of in this close collaboration between the American intelligence services, the Nazis and the fascists. Angleton, on his end, recruited fascists to end the war in Italy so as to minimize the power of the communists. Valerio Borghese was one of his key contacts because this hardline fascist in Mussolini’s regime was ready to serve the Americans in the anti-communist struggle, and he became one of the international figureheads for postwar fascism. Angleton had directly saved him from the hands of the communists, and the man known as the Black Prince was given the opportunity to continue the war against the radical Left under a new boss: the CIA.

Once the war was over, Senior U.S. intelligence officials, including Dulles, Wisner and Carmel Offie, “worked to ensure that denazification only had a limited scope,” [according to Frédéric Charpier](#): “Generals, senior officials, policemen, industrialists, lawyers, economists, diplomats, scholars and real war criminals were spared and put back in their positions.” The man in charge of the Marshall Plan in Germany, for instance, was a former adviser to Hermann Göring, the commander-in-chief of the *Luftwaffe* (air force). Dulles drafted a list of high functionaries of the Nazi state to be protected and passed off as opponents to Hitler. The OSS-CIA proceeded to rebuild the administrative states in Germany and Italy with their anti-communist allies.

[Eric Lichtblau estimates](#) that more than 10,000 Nazis were able to immigrate to the United States in the post-war period (at least 700 official members of the Nazi party had been allowed into the U.S. in the 1930s, while [Jewish refugees were being turned away](#)). In addition to a few hundred German spies and thousands of SS personnel, [Operation Paperclip](#), which began in May 1945, brought at least 1,600 Nazi scientists to the U.S. with their

families. This undertaking was aimed at recovering the great minds of the Nazi war machine and putting their research on rockets, aviation, biological and chemical weapons, and so forth, in the service of the American empire. The Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency was set up specifically to recruit Nazis and find their positions in research centers, the government, the army, the intelligence services or universities (at least 14 universities participated, including Cornell, Yale and MIT).

Although the program officially excluded ardent Nazis, at least at the beginning, in actual fact it allowed for the immigration of chemists from IG Farben (which had supplied the deadly gases used in mass exterminations), scientists who had used slaves in concentration camps to make weapons, and doctors who had participated in hideous experiments on Jews, Roma, communists, homosexuals and other prisoners of war. These scientists, who were described by an official in the State Department opposed to Paperclip as “Hitler’s angels of death,” were received with open arms in the land of the free. They were given comfortable accommodations, a laboratory with assistants and the promise of citizenship if their work bore fruit. They went on to conduct research that has been used in the manufacturing of ballistic missiles, sarin gas cluster bombs, and the weaponization of the bubonic plague.

The CIA also collaborated with MI6 to set up secret anti-communist armies in every country in Western Europe. On the pretext of a potential invasion by the Red Army, the idea was to train and equip [networks of illegal stay-behind soldiers](#), who would remain behind enemy lines if the Russians moved westward. They would thus be activated in the newly occupied territory and charged with missions of exfiltration, espionage, sabotage, propaganda, subversion and combat. The two agencies worked with NATO and the intelligence services of many Western European countries to build this vast sub-rosa organization, establish numerous weapons and ammunition caches, and equip their soldiers of the shadows with everything they needed. To do this, they recruited Nazis, fascists, collaborationists and other anti-communist members of the extreme Right. The numbers vary according to the country, but they are estimated between a few dozen and several hundred, or even a few thousand, per country. According to [a report from the television program *Retour aux sources*](#), there were 50 stay-behind network units in Norway, 150 in Germany, more than 600 in Italy and 3,000 in France.

These trained militants would later be mobilized to commit or coordinate terrorist attacks against the civilian population, which were then blamed on the communists in order to justify ‘law and order’ crackdowns. According to the official numbers in Italy, where this strategy of tension was particularly intense, there were 14,591 politically motivated acts of violence between 1969 and 1987, which killed 491 people and injured 1,181. Vincenzo Vinciguerra, a member of the far-right group Ordine Nuovo and the perpetrator of the bombing near Peteano in 1972, [explained](#) that the fascist “Avanguardia Nazionale, like Ordine Nuovo, were being mobilized into the battle as part of an anti-Communist strategy originating not with

organizations deviant from the institutions of power, but from the state itself, and specifically from within the ambit of the state's relations within the Atlantic Alliance." An Italian parliamentary commission that undertook an investigation of the stay-behind armies in Italy, reached [the following conclusion](#) in 2000: "Those massacres, those bombs, those military actions had been organized or promoted or supported by men inside Italian state institutions and, as has been discovered more recently, by men linked to the structures of United States intelligence."

The U.S. National Security State was also involved in overseeing ratlines that exfiltrated fascists from Europe and allowed them to resettle in safe havens around the world, in exchange for doing its dirty work. The case of Klaus Barbie is but one among thousands, but it speaks volumes regarding the internal functioning of this process. Known in France as 'the butcher of Lyon,' he was head of the Gestapo office there for two years, including the time when Himmler gave the order to deport at least 22,000 Jews from France. This specialist in 'enhanced interrogation tactics,' known for torturing to death the coordinator of the French Resistance, Jean Moulin, organized the first roundup of the General Union of Jews in France in February 1943 and the massacre of 41 Jewish refugee children in Izieu in April 1944. Before arriving in Lyon, he had led savage death squads, which had killed more than a million people on the Eastern Front [according to Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair](#). But after the war, the man whom these same authors describe as third on the most-wanted list of SS criminals was working for the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the U.S. Army. He was hired to help build the stay-behind armies by recruiting other Nazis, and to spy on French intelligence services in the French and American controlled regions in Germany.

When France learned what was happening and demanded Barbie's extradition, John McCloy, the U.S. High Commissioner of Germany, refused by claiming that the allegations were based on hearsay. Nevertheless, it ultimately proved too expensive, symbolically, to keep a butcher like Barbie in Europe, so he was sent to Latin America in 1951, where he was able to continue his illustrious career. Settling in Bolivia, he worked for the security forces of the military dictatorship of General René Barrientos and for the Ministry of the Interior and the counter-insurgency wing of the Bolivian Army under the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer, before actively participating in the Cocaine Coup in 1980 and becoming the director of security forces under General Meza. Throughout his career, he maintained close relationships with his saviors in the U.S. National Security State, playing a central role in Operation Condor, the counter-insurgency project that brought together Latin American dictatorships, with the support of the United States, to violently crush any attempt at egalitarian uprisings from below. He also helped develop the drug empire in Bolivia, including organizing gangs of narco-mercenaries whom he named *Los novios de la muerte*, whose uniforms resembled those of the SS. He traveled freely in the 1960s and 1970s, visiting the U.S. at least seven

times, and he most likely played a role in the manhunt organized by the Agency to kill Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

The same basic pattern of integrating fascists into the global war against communism is readily identifiable in Japan, whose system of government prior to and during the war has been described by Herbert P. Bix as “Emperor-system fascism.” Tessa Morris-Suzuki [has convincingly demonstrated](#) the continuity of intelligence services by detailing how the U.S. National Security State oversaw and managed the KATO organization. This private intelligence network, very much like the Gehlen organization, was stocked with former leading members of the military and intelligence services, including the Imperial Army’s Chief of Intelligence (Arisue Seizō), who shared with his American handler (Charles Willoughby) a deep admiration for Mussolini. The U.S. occupation forces also cultivated tight relationships with senior officials in Japan’s wartime civilian intelligence community (most notably Ogata Taketora). This remarkable continuity between prewar and postwar Japan has led Morris-Suzuki and other scholars to map Japanese history in terms of a *transwar regime*, meaning one that continued from before to after the war. This concept also allows us to make sense of what was happening above ground in the realm of the visible government. For the sake of concision, suffice it to cite the remarkable case of the man known as the “Devil of Shōwa” for his brutal rule of Manchukuo (the Japanese colony in Northeast China): Nobusuke Kishi. A great admirer of Nazi Germany, Kishi was appointed Minister of Munitions by Prime Minister Hideki Tojo in 1941, in order to prepare Japan for a total war against the U.S., and he was the one who signed the official declaration of war against America. After serving a brief prison term as a war criminal in the postwar era, he was rehabilitated by the CIA, along with his cell mate, the kingpin of organized crime Yoshio Kodama. Kishi, with the support and generous financial backing of his handlers, took over the Liberal Party, made it into a rightwing club of former leaders of imperial Japan, and rose to become Prime Minister. “The [CIA] money flowed for at least fifteen years, under four American presidents,” [writes Tim Wiener](#), “and it helped consolidate one-party rule in Japan for the rest of the cold war.”

U.S. national security services have also established a global educational network to train pro-capitalist combatants—sometimes under the leadership of experienced Nazis and fascists—in the tried-and-true techniques of repression, torture and destabilization, as well as propaganda and psychological warfare. The [famous School of the Americas](#) was established in 1946 with the explicit goal of training a new generation of anti-communist warriors worldwide. According to some, this school has the distinction of having educated the greatest number of dictators in world history. Whatever the case may be, it is part of a much larger institutional network. It is worth mentioning, for example, the educational contributions of the Public Safety Program: “For about twenty-five years,” [writes former CIA officer John Stockwell](#), “the CIA, [...] trained and organized police and paramilitary officers from around

the world in techniques of population control, repression, and torture. Schools were set up in the United States, Panama, and Asia, from which tens of thousands graduated. In some cases, former Nazi officers from Hitler's Third Reich were used as instructors."

Fascism Goes Global under Liberal Cover

The American imperium has thus played a central role in the construction of a fascist international by protecting right-wing militants and enlisting them in the Third World War against 'communism,' an elastic label extended to any political orientation that entered into conflict with the interests of the capitalist ruling class. This international expansion of fascist modes of governance has led to a proliferation of concentration camps, terrorist and torture campaigns, dirty wars, dictatorial regimes, vigilante groups and organized crime networks around the world. The examples could be enumerated ad nauseum, but I will curtail them in the interests of space and simply invoke the [testimony of Victor Marchetti](#), who was a senior CIA official from 1955 to 1969: "We were supporting every half-assed dictator, military junta, oligarchy that existed in the Third World, as long as they promised to somehow maintain the status quo, which would of course be beneficial to U.S. geopolitical interests, military interests, big business interests, and other special interests."

The record of U.S. foreign policy since WWII is probably the best measure of its unique contribution to the internationalization of fascism. Under the banner of democracy and freedom, the United States has, [according to William Blum](#):

- + Endeavored to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments.
- + Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
- + Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
- + Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
- + Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.

The Association for Responsible Dissent, composed of 14 former CIA officers, [calculated](#) that their agency was responsible for killing a minimum of 6 million people in 3,000 major operations and 10,000 minor operations between 1947 and 1987. These are direct murders, so the numbers do not account for premature deaths under the fascist-backed capitalist world system due to mass incarceration, torture, malnutrition, lack of drinkable water, exploitation, oppression, social degradation, ecological illness or curable disease (in 2017, [according to the U.N.](#), 6.3 million children and young adolescents died from avoidable causes linked to the socio-economic and ecological inequalities of the Capitalocene, which amounts to one child dying every 5 seconds).

To establish itself as the global military hegemon and international guard dog of capitalism, the U.S. government and National Security State have relied on the help of the significant number of Nazis and fascists it integrated into its global network of repression, including the 1,600 Nazis brought into the U.S. through Operation Paperclip, the 4,000 or so integrated into the Gehlen organization, the tens or even hundreds of thousands that were reintegrated into

the ‘postwar’—or rather transwar—regimes in fascist countries, the large number who were given free passage to Empire’s backyard—Latin America—and elsewhere, as well as the thousands or tens of thousands integrated into NATO’s secret stay-behind armies. This global network of seasoned anti-communist assassins has also been used to train armies of terrorists around the world to participate in dirty wars, coups d’état, destabilization efforts, sabotage, and terror campaigns.

All of this has been done under the cover of a liberal democracy, and with the assistance of its powerful culture industries. The true legacy of WWII, far from being that of a liberal world order that had defeated fascism, is that of a veritable fascist international developed under liberal cover in order to try and destroy those who had actually fought and won the war against fascism: the communists.

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