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# Political Denial as a Counterintelligence Vehicle to Counter Counterterrorist Operations: The Sudan

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**Abstract.** This article describes the political denial that is implemented by terrorists and supporters of terrorists after an adversary counterterrorist operation and that is intended to impede future operations. Sudanese-sponsored and supported terrorism and United States Government counterterrorist operations are used as an example. The analysis is predicated on the assumption that there is incontrovertible intelligence data supporting the belief that Shifa Pharmaceutical Industries in Sudan was engaged in the development and/or transshipment of the chemical warfare agent VX--an assumption based on the alleged detection of a VX precursor that allegedly has no legitimate business or industrial use. (IBPP Note: As of this writing, there are at least three alternative hypotheses: (1) The precursor was accurately detected but can have other innocuous uses. (2) The precursor was inaccurately detected for an agricultural insecticide with similar chemical structure. (3) The precursor was accurately detected but was a byproduct of the breakdown of other pesticides.)

After the United States Government (USG)-sponsored bombing of Shifa Pharmaceutical Industries, a number of deception operations have been implemented by terrorists and supporters of terrorists. These operations are intended to discover as much as possible about the intelligence and counterintelligence sources and methods of the USG and its allies in antiterrorism and counterterrorism pursuits. As these sources and methods are compromised, effective antiterrorism and counterterrorism operations become ever more difficult. Political denial of terrorist activity--the simplest of the deception operations--in response to a counterterrorist operation will be analyzed as an example.

**Analysis.** The Sudanese Government has denied that the Shifa plant had anything to do with VX development and transshipment. This denial can be supported in at least four ways. First, historical data support the notion that the USG has intentionally represented falsehoods in at least some foreign policy conflicts. Second, segments of global populations are primed to believe that anything represented by the USG may be a lie. Third, segments of global populations will not believe that the USG may have represented falsehoods in this case but will nevertheless treat Sudanese denials as if the denials were true for altruistic and egoistic purposes. Fourth, segments of global populations may exhibit varieties of cognitive processing supporting causal and moral attributions that are compatible with the Sudanese denial.

As a consequence, the political denial generates external and internal pressures that build on USG representatives and their supporters "in the know" to divulge more information leading to the conclusion that Shifa and VX were linked. This information can then be analyzed by terrorists and their supporters to identify intelligence and counterintelligence sources and methods.

Once identified, the sources and methods can be compromised in several ways. Deceptive practices can be implemented so that intelligence sources and methods will pick up and interpret what terrorists and their supporters desire to be picked up and interpreted. Nondeceptive practices can be implemented by terrorists and their supporters that will not be picked up and interpreted by the USG. In a similar manner, deceptive and nondeceptive practices can be implemented against USG counterintelligence.

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As more and more information is released due to pressure initiated by terrorist and terrorist supporters, the compromise of USG intelligence and counterintelligence continues to be facilitated. In fact, the pressure itself--once initiated--is then further potentiated by unwitting political entities invested with wrong-headed notions of fairness, the golden mean, the good that is within everyone, giving peace a chance, abhorrence of tit-for-tat violence, and various psychodynamic conflicts. Also, even sophisticated experts--e.g., a former Central Intelligence Agency operations officer with extensive experience involving Islamic paramilitary groups (Bearden, 1998)--may contribute to pressure on the counterterrorist initiator purely through impartial contemplation, dialogue, and analysis.

Much as a national politician in a democratic republic who is accused of wrong doing must engage in a calculus of response based partially on legal, ethical, moral, political, so must the representatives of a political entity--especially one purported to be a democratic republic--after having engaged in a counterterrorist operation that publicly exhibits that entity's signature. Given that there will almost always be significant domestic and international opposition to any political act--including a counterterrorist operation--and that operational errors, bad luck, and unique features can easily be highlighted or misinterpreted as appropriate, pressure initiated from the political denial of terrorism by a counterterrorist target is a cheap, simple, and at least partially effective defense. Interestingly, in an analogous fashion, psychodynamic denial is the simplest and most primitive defense mechanism of unconscious conflict resolution. And to conclude with a research question, is political denial fueled by psychodynamic denial a defensively more or less robust approach to conflict resolution? (See Bearden, M. (August 26, 1998). Explaining our actions in the Sudan. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Martinez, D.C. (1987). On the morality of Machiavellian deceivers. *Psychology: A Quarterly Journal of Human Behavior*, 24, 47-56; Myers, S.L. (August 25, 1998). U.S. says Iraq aided production of chemical weapons in Sudan. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Myers, S.L., & Weiner, T. (August 27, 1998). Possible benign use is seen for chemical at factory in Sudan. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Pachter, H. (1974). When the government is lying. *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, 13, 184-195; Webb, R.E. (1998). *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 11, 117-132; Welles, J. (1981). The sociobiology of self-deception. *Human Ethology Newsletter*, 3, 14-19.) (Keywords: Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, Intelligence, Sudan, Terrorism.)