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Tales of counterterrorist officer Free World a moral

Gayle Rivers is the pseudonym of a professional soldier who says he is now a professional counterterrorist. His bona fides are vouched for by the publisher of his book, *The Specialist: Revelations of a Counterterrorist*. (Stein & Day).

Mr. Rivers, a New Zealander by origin, has decided to go public after a long career as a mercenary for the secret service agencies of the United States, Britain, Spain, Egypt, and on behalf of Iraq in the war against Iran. The highly specialized Western strike forces such as those he has worked with against terrorist organizations like the IRA, the Basque ETA, Syria (all three supported by Libya) successfully fought "terrorism with its own weapons" — counterassassination, counterbombing, countertorture and counterkidnapping.

The author describes himself as clean-shaven with neatly trimmed hair, of conservative dress, medium height. He drives a Porsche Targa with local Swiss license plates assigned to the Vaud canton. His retainer is \$75,000 plus expenses, and the final amount could be double or triple, depending on how much assistance he needs to carry out the assignment.

He served originally with ANZAC special forces in Vietnam, has been down to the U.S. Special Forces training center at Fort Bragg and speaks familiarly of the elite British counterterrorist organization, the SAS, in which he says he is a reservist who has fought the IRA. He has also been a "contract mercenary specialist in South Africa." He flies fixed-wing airplanes and helicopters.

His favorite recreations are "beautiful women," à la James Bond, and music. His cover is that of a salesman of "specialized military hardware." All of the above may be true, some of it, or none of it. If one reads this as fiction, then *The Specialist* is the best thriller I have read in years. Yet much of Mr. Rivers's "memoir" does ring true.

Although Mr. Rivers says he has disguised names, dates, and places so as to protect the anti-terrorist network, he has done press, radio, and television interviews with voice and appearance disguised. Not, I would judge, the best kind of security. I asked his publisher how he was disguised. The publisher declined to answer, merely saying that even if you had seen Mr. Rivers in a TV studio, you wouldn't recognize him if you saw him half-an-hour later on the street.

In any case, whether the incidents he writes about in enormous and sanguinary detail are true or not obviously cannot be answered except, perhaps, by his publisher, whose anti-totalitarian credentials are impeccable. Yet there is no question that the author (or authors — the adventures could be a composite of several Gayle Riverses) knows a good deal about contemporary terrorism. The book, therefore, has an intrinsic value whether we believe Mr. Rivers's experiences 100 percent or not.

He thinks that, "the United States is ripe for a terrorist explosion." Europe, on the other hand, "has got its counterterrorism machinery into

good order [because] European police forces have learned just how strong the ties are between terrorist world groups."

Such praise for Western Europe seems to me to be misplaced. Mr. Rivers concedes that the French government is so fearful of reprisals that it does nothing about the *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), which, operating in Southern France, seeks through terrorism to establish an independent Marxist state in the Basque part of Spain. The current spate of bombings in Paris without arrests hardly confirms that France's counterterrorism machinery is in good order.

As for the British, the Labor and Tory governments have bungled the war on the IRA, says Mr. Rivers. The West German government can't seem to halt bombing of U.S. military installations. Belgium hasn't caught its terrorists. Only the Italian government has shown a pertina-

cious will and a remarkable understanding of terrorism and what must be done about it, especially when the life of Pope John Paul is at stake.

From a counterterrorist veteran like Mr. Rivers, there is a peculiar omission in this book, one which troubles me greatly. Apparently, he never came across Communist involvement in terrorist activities in the West. With all his years of experience as a counterterrorist, and with his close contacts with Western secret services, it seemed to me hardly likely that he would have almost no knowledge about either Soviet or Soviet bloc terrorist operations and the training to be had in the Communist camp network.

One might argue that since he is writing about his personal experiences he sticks to what he knows, although I do find it odd that he makes a point of denying that his counterterrorism resembles that of "Fascist" death squads. In view of the provable existence of KGB death squads and Soviet *Spetsnaz* killers, which go unmentioned in Mr. Rivers's book, the use of the word "Fascist" sounds weirdly anachronistic and politically dubious.

It is because of the omission of KGB activities and the strange use of political language that at least one former CIA official has argued that Mr. Rivers's book is an example of KGB disinformation. The "disinformation" line is that the KGB wanted to portray U.S. counterterrorist activities as being just as bloody and barbaric as the terrorist organizations they operate against.

On May 28, I raised these questions in a telephone interview with both the publisher, Sol Stein, and Mr. Rivers himself at the publisher's home in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. Mr. Rivers said he had omitted mention of the Soviet Union and its KGB because important academic studies on these subjects have been published. I was not at all impressed with this explanation.

Mr. Stein added that both he and Mr. Rivers had been on the Larry King three-hour radio interview show April 4, and that at least an hour of the interview had been devoted to Soviet terrorist activities.

Mr. Rivers told me he was still "involved" with the CIA, MIS and MI6. If he is still working for the agency, then it is the height of irre-

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sponsibility to announce that one of his clients was Iraq, thereby affording "proof" to Iran of U.S. involvement on behalf of Iraq. It is equally irresponsible — if Mr. Rivers is still loyal to his various "old firms" — to announce that among his many employers was South Africa. Who do such revelations help if not the KGB or Soviet "disinformation" propaganda?

On the other hand, what Mr. Rivers has done in disclosing that he has worked for Iraq and South Africa allegedly on behalf of the United States is no worse than *The Washington Post* story of May 12 which reported that a CIA-trained counter-terrorist group in Lebanon had hired another Lebanese band for a car-bombing job which killed more than 80 March 8. The CIA denied the link and one administration official said that the news story "had put the lives of every American in Lebanon in jeopardy." Americans being held prisoner in Iran are certainly not going to be helped by Mr. Rivers's allegation that he has fought for Iraq in its five-year war against Iran.

Suspicion about a pseudonymous political author is always warranted but rarely conclusive without evidence of some kind which goes beyond the Italian maxim, *Si non e vero, e ben trovato* ("Even if it isn't true, it is quite possible"). In any case, there are several amazing incidents Mr. Rivers tells us about which, I think, could be confirmed independently.

ITEM: In 1981, U.S. terrorist experts, including Fort Bragg Special Forces, CIA agents, Louisiana police, and Navy SEAL teams (waterborne warfare specialists)

"seized" an oil collection platform in the Gulf of Mexico, offshore from the port of Morgan City, La. It seems every agency of government was involved except the FBI. The event was based on a scenario devised by Mr. Rivers to see how prepared the United States was for such an emergency. The local press was told it was genuine. Only a handful of people knew this was not a genuine terrorist heist.

ITEM: An old friend of Mr. Rivers is identified as Dale Brinton, a salesman for the McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Corp., trying to peddle DC10s to Egypt. In Cairo, where Mr. Rivers had contracted to teach Egyptian pilots to fly the French Mirage, an event which disturbed the Israeli secret service, the Mossad, his friend Mr. Brinton, who speaks fluent French, was pistol-whipped and badly beaten one night in a dark Cairene alley.

The Rivers stories do have a strange authenticity. For me, they have a single moral: the war against terrorism will not be won until we accept as a given that the terrorist has declared war against free societies. Therefore, we must start treating terrorists caught in *flagrante delicto* as enemy soldiers out of uniform and, therefore, deserving not the protection of the Bill of Rights but a drumhead court-martial, reserved in wartime for spies caught behind the lines.

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