

BOOK REVIEW:
MORTEN STORM WITH PAUL CRUICKSHANK & TIM LISTER,
“AGENT STORM: MY LIFE INSIDE AL QAEDA AND THE CIA (2014)”

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Publication Date on RIEAS (www.rieas.gr) on 5 March 2015

Agent Storm feels like a James Bond story or one of John Le Carre’s marvelous spy-thrillers. Yet, the story written by CNN’s Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister is a true account. The journey of Morten Storm provides valuable insights into high-stakes intelligence operations, as well as the social issues surrounding radicalization and extremism. It is a first-rate account of how a troubled young Danish Christian, with a history of petty criminality, incarceration and drug use converted to Islam and entered into its most extremist jihadi circles in Denmark and Britain, ultimately becoming a trusted member of al-Qaeda (AQ). Storm represents the highest level of Western intelligence penetration of AQ’s most dangerous affiliate – al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP.

Some may be highly skeptical of Storm’s claims. Indeed, Cruickshank and Lister specialize in international security and terrorism. They acknowledge that Storm’s account will face scrutiny, but stand by his credibility as a witness to the inner-workings of contemporary AQ. They cite audiovisual evidence and records of electronic communications that “both corroborate his story and enrich his account.” Then, the spy-thriller story begins to unveil.

Morten Storm celebrated his 13th birthday by attempting an armed robbery. His life spiraled into “a cycle of drugs, gratuitous violence and hardcore partying.” He went to prison twice. Denmark funds social programs to rehabilitate wayward youth like Storm, but he was incorrigible.

Later in his youth, Storm left for the United Kingdom, where he found refuge in a community of the Islamic faithful after becoming a Muslim. He became a member of radical circles in Birmingham and London, and he made valuable connections to the militant group al-Shabaab in East Africa and AQAP in Yemen. Storm then achieved something unusual: He became a member of Anwar al-Awlaki’s inner circle. Al-

Awlaki, one of AQ's top leaders, had inspired many Western jihadi terrorists, such as Major Nidal Hassan (the November 2009 Fort Hood murderer), Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the unsuccessful 2009 Christmas Day airliner bomber) and the Tsarnaev brothers (who conducted the Boston Marathon bombings in mid-April 2013). Storm also befriended other notable jihadist operatives and leaders, including Zacarias Moussaoui, who helped plan the 9/11 attack on the twin towers, and Nasser al-Wuhayshi, the head of AQAP.

Storm had an epiphany in early 2007. Rejecting radical Islam's justifications for the murder and mutilation of civilians, he took steps to contact The Danish Security and Intelligence Service (DSIS, or PET in Danish). Storm offered his services to counter and betray his former comrades in European jihadi circles and AQ around the world. One of the most telling and vivid stories of the book is how Storm approached British and American intelligence agents in order to offer his assistance. Storm says his work made possible the killings of multiple militants, a fact he claims troubled but did not deter him. The book is filled with dramatic accounts of Mr. Storm's involvement in numerous Western intelligence penetrations of AQ and its affiliates, whether in Yemen or Somalia. As well as with its extremist adherents in Europe, especially in Denmark, Sweden and Britain.

In September 2009, Mr. Storm was asked by al-Awlaki, his longtime "mentor" (whom he had befriended while living in Yemen in 2006), to find him a wife. Storm, who had divorced his first Muslim wife and was living in England with his second, found a suitable potential bride for al-Awlaki on a radical Muslim Facebook site. She was a beautiful, blonde 32-year old Muslim convert from Croatia named Aminah, who was willing to travel to Yemen to meet and marry the already married al-Awlaki. What al-Awlaki did not know was that this "matchmaking" was orchestrated and financed by the British and American intelligence services. Agents from these services had planted tracking devices in her suitcase and an electronic Arabic pocket dictionary that they hoped would lead them to al-Awlaki's whereabouts in Yemen's lawless tribal areas. Storm's current narration is backed up by extensive evidence in the form of financial documents and videos.

The accounts were given in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* by Storm himself. Reporters thoroughly checked the evidence he presented, including a video message al-Awlaki sent to his intended bride and a snapshot of a briefcase full of \$250,000 in C.I.A. cash, his resulting payment. Storm even had a recording, made surreptitiously on his iPhone, of a C.I.A. officer trying to persuade him that his work, while excellent, had not led to the drone strike that killed al-Awlaki in September 2011.

However, Storm's relationship with the world of clandestine intelligence services proved short-lived; he was fed up with the intelligence agencies' "turf wars", the feuds between spies, and decided to give up

and go public. According to Storm, he turned down an offer of \$400,000 to keep his mouth shut. The resulting story is a valuable window to both sides of a lethal underground war.

Storm's book shows how radical Islamist circles in Europe identify and send their promising convert adherents to "study" at jihadist religious schools, such as the extremist Dammaj Institute in Yemen. Upon return to their countries of origin, recruits are expected to further radicalize others into pro-AQ violent extremism and martyrdom terrorist operations. However, the book's commentary on the social causes and consequences of extremism is perhaps its most compelling feature.

Today, when so many young Western Muslims are flocking to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of genocidal insurgents such as the al Nusra Front and the Islamic State, this book's insights could not be more important.