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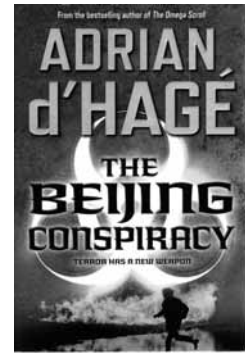
BOOK REVIEW

The Beijing Conspiracy

by Adrian d'Hagé

Penguin Group (Australia): Camberwell; 2007; 530 pp.; ISBN 978 0 670 02958 7;

RRP \$32.95 (paperback)



It is not our normal practice to review novels in *United Service*, but an exception is being made in this instance because the author is a highly-respected, recently-retired Australian soldier and the topic is both relevant and timely – the danger that global terror poses as the world prepares for the Beijing Olympics in August this year.

Brigadier A. S. d'Hagé, AM, MC (Retd), graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1967 into the Australian Intelligence Corps. He subsequently saw operational service in Vietnam as a rifle platoon commander, where he won the Military Cross on 11 June 1969. His regimental service culminated in command of 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, in 1984-85; and subsequent staff appointments included Director of Joint Operations, Head of Defence Public Relations, and Head of Defence Planning for security of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. He was appointed a Member in the Military Division of the Order of Australia in 1994.

Since retiring from the Army in October 2000, Adrian d'Hagé has obtained an honours degree in theology and pursued a writing career. His first novel, *The Omega Scroll* (Penguin, 2005), was an international best-seller. *The Beijing Conspiracy* is his second novel. He is presently at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University, completing a doctorate examining the influence of religion on United States foreign policy in the Middle East. Few could be better qualified to write a novel on global terror.

While this is a novel and most of the characters are fictional, the scenarios are realistic – the types of contingencies that our intelligence, defence and security agencies must plan and rehearse for and for which they must maintain constant vigilance. The novel exposes us to four different terrorist scenarios. For each scenario, we learn how the terrorists plan the scenario, including the role of the internet in providing the technological knowledge and in assisting the targeting; details of the logistic arrangements and support networks activated for the mission; and the operational details, including the ultimate execution.

The scenarios explore the use of: ammonium nitrate fertiliser packed in 'truck bombs' to blow up buildings and motorway tunnels; merchant shipping to launch attacks on key infrastructure in major ports; shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles (readily available from arms dealers in Pakistan) to bring down passenger aircraft on take-off; the release of nuclear radiation in the form of radioactive caesium chloride (readily available from discarded photocells) in the water supply, air conditioners and ambient air of major cities; and the genetic

engineering of an Ebola-smallpox pathogen, followed by its release at the Beijing Olympics, which potentially could lead to a world-wide pandemic. The last scenario, until recently in the realm of science fiction, may have moved to the cutting edge of biotechnology and d'Hagé suggests it may not be beyond the tentacles of global terrorist groups.

The novel also alludes to central planning and coordination by al Qaeda, coupled with local execution frequently by terrorists 'home grown' in the target country. It exposes the reader to the thinking that inspires and motivates Islamist terrorist groups, such as the sense of shame and anger that 'Christian' armies are occupying Arab lands near Islam's most holy sites; the Palestinian situation and the West's support for Israel; the invasion of Iraq, which has made the nations comprising the 'coalition of the willing' much more susceptible to terrorist attack; and second-generation Western Muslims, often highly educated, angry at the treatment they are experiencing in their own country (e.g. Britain) and angry at the lies their government has told them about the invasion of Iraq.

d'Hagé also details the historic background and current plight of the Muslim Uighurs of Xinjiang (Sinkiang or East Turkestan) autonomous region in north-western China, suppressed and persecuted for half a century by the dominant Han Chinese – a story similar to that of their southern neighbours, the Tibetans. He predicts that the Uighurs will attempt to use the Beijing Olympics to draw international attention to their cause.

Importantly, d'Hagé demonstrates how the terrorist situation is exacerbated by Christian fundamentalists and particularly by the political expression of their views through the current United States Government. Cities can never be completely protected from terrorist attack, which underlies the need for intelligence – intelligence that will not be forthcoming if foreign and domestic policies alienate and isolate different ethnic and cultural groups.

The messages that d'Hagé seeks to convey, given their security implications, their timeliness, and the political sensitivities that they arouse, lend themselves to a novel. And what a good novel it is! It is simply written in brief chapters and takes the reader from the unfamiliar territories of central Asia and the Hindu Kush, to the major cities of the United States, England, China and Australia. The plot hums along and the excitement builds to a crescendo as each scenario arrives at its dénouement. I commend *The Beijing Conspiracy* to you.

David Leece