

# DIELLI'S INTERVIEW WITH SARAH-JANE CORKE

To continue to appreciate the influence of such an important personality such as Mithat Frasheri, Dielli interviewed the author of the book *US Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy*. Sarah-Jane Corke is an Associate Professor of History at University of New Brunswick.

Recent publications with reference to Mithat Frasheri were featured at the commemorative evening hosted by the Queens branch of Vatra to honor the distinguished Albanian figure.

One of them delves into the historical factors and the complex relations between the British and the Americans regarding their efforts to liberate Albania from the communists and the Soviet control after the end of WWII.

**DIELLI:** In the introduction of your book, you write that it 'attempts to address the gap in the historiography to offer a more nuanced appreciation of American strategic thinking during Truman's administration'. What is the importance of addressing such a gap in our knowledge and understanding of history?

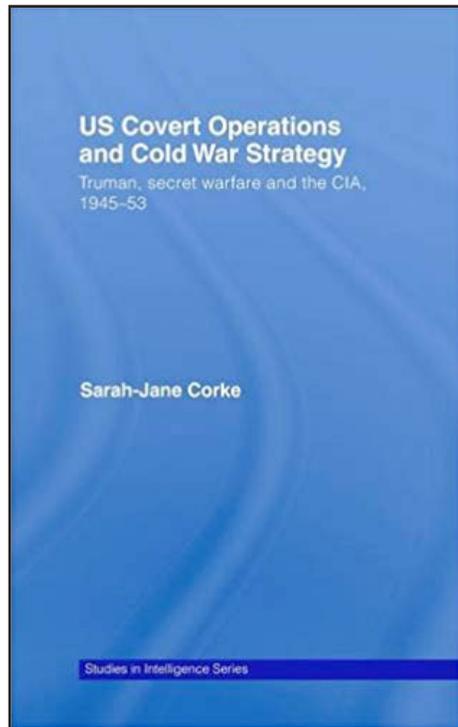
The traditional scholarship had for a very, very long time, suggested that US foreign policy during the Cold War was a coherent strategy of containment. The term containment implied that US foreign policy was defensive and reactive. It was, in other words, it was responding to Soviet aggressions. By challenging this notion and focusing on aggressive American actions, the American role in the Cold War is problematized. We begin to understand that American foreign policy was more complicated than we previously understood.

**DIELLI:** Events such as the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI are moments when remembrance of sacrifice and patriotism take center stage on a wide scale. Your book takes a hard look at another war, namely the Cold War era in the US revealing a political landscape with uncertain goals and redefined front lines of intricate, treacherous and deadly nature. In broad terms, what defines the legacy of the Cold War during the second term of Truman's presidency?

I would say that the key issue the Truman Administration faced, and an issue that still resonates today, is the difficulty in ensuring that foreign policy and intelligence operations are in sync. The breakdown that occurred at the strategic level greatly hampered the ability of the Truman administration to develop and execute successful covert operations. When a country's foreign policy remains vague, which happens for a number of reasons, it is difficult for operations personnel to effectively do their jobs.

**DIELLI:** The declassified documents that were made available over a decade ago illustrate, among other things, a discordance between policy and strategy in the postwar years specifically with regard to Covert Operations by the American Intelligence. What new documents have come to light, if any, since the publication of your book?

There have not been a lot of new declassifications, at least that I am aware of. But there are two important



new books Operation Valuable FIEND by Albert Lulushi and The Albanian Operation of the CIA and MI6, 1949-1953 by Nicholas Bethell (edited by Robert Elsie and Bejulla Destani) that add considerable detail to the events that unfolded.

**DIELLI:** Your presentation of the documents in the chapter 'A clinical experiment' expands the understanding of the 'Anglo-American frictions' with regard to covert operations that were undertaken in Albania, specifically in Operation Valuable in 1949. According to numerous documents, the British and Americans did not agree on which émigré organization to support nor on the method of insertion of paramilitary teams. How great was the impact of the discordance on the task at hand namely to help the resistance groups inside Albania to overthrow the communists?

It was very significant. The British would withdraw their support for the operation and came to view those who continued the operation in the United States as overly aggressive in their anti-communism. It caused a rift between the intelligence agencies and the two countries.

**DIELLI:** As it happens the fate of leading Albanian figures such as Mithat Frasheri become intertwined with the policy and strategic planning of a conflicted US administration. Under George Kennan's plan, which represented the position of the State Department, East European ex patriots would be brought together under so-called 'Freedom Committees' financed by the US. One of the first to be set up was the Albanian National Committee which was to provide a nucleus for the Albanian government in exile. Mithat Frasheri became the first president of the organization. As you point out, Mithat Frasheri never lived to see Operation Valuable unfold. He passed away on October 3, 1949. Commemorating him 69 years later, the Pan-Albanian Federation Vatra brought

attention to your book for providing new information on the subject and especially his important role during this period of Albania's history. Would you please share more with our readers?

What happened in Albania was a tragedy. It became very important to me, in the course of writing the book, to point out the way in which the Albanian people, who desired nothing more than the return of their homeland, were treated by the British and Americans who were in charge of the operation. Frank Wisner called it "a clinical experiment." It was an experiment that cost approximately 1000 lives. This was the tragedy. Frasheri was one of the Albanians who I believe was not well served by the British and the Americans. In short, neither the US nor the Brits accorded the Albanians the respect they deserved.

**DIELLI:** You mention tensions and serious political divisions within the Free Albania Committee which reflected the deep-rooted factions within the Albanian society. In the same chapter, you write; '...this is important because it compounded the controversy over the structure of Albania's post-liberation government. What are some of the important lessons that have emerged with respect to a dysfunctional administration during the Cold War?

The key lesson for me was to ensure that policy, strategy and operations were in sync. Within this context, I think administrators have to avoid the tendency to write broad policy statements. Often this happens so that any controversies that exist over a policy can be papered over. If there are controversies I think they need to be resolved before the policy is signed by the President. Without clear policy guidance you can have multiple strategies put into play. Sometimes, as I pointed out in the book, these strategies can contradict each other. The best example which I wrote about in the book was that given that there was

no clear objectives on what US policy was, it remained unclear whether it was more important to encourage people to leave Eastern Europe or to stay behind to serve as resistance forces should a possible World War III broke out. Propaganda beamed into East European countries encouraged East Europeans to both leave their countries and to stay and serve as a resistance force. Second, once people did leave, the "West" was not prepared to provide safe places for all the refugees. Some were housed in former concentration camps and eventually returned to the East with only horror stories to tell their friends and relatives.

**DIELLI:** Where is the Study of Intelligence Series going next?

There have been a lot of newly released documents on American involvement in Iran in 1953 and Cuba in 1960. There will be new histories on both of these topics in the next few years. However, there has been a decline in the number of scholarly intelligence history over the last decade, for a number of reasons. Unfortunately, American intelligence history relies on the willingness of the CIA to declassify its archives. It also depends on the national archives being well funded so that they can do the declassifications in a timely fashion. Documents also come out in fits and starts and those that are declassified do not always appear in any order. Writing intelligence history can be intensely rewarding but it can also be challenging for these reasons.

Those that are interested in intelligence history should contact the North American Society for Intelligence History (NASIH).

Finally, on the anniversary of Albania's Independence I want to send my sincere best wishes to the people of Albania, both those at home and abroad. Over the course of writing the book I met a number of wonderful Albanians who I still think of warmly today. I hope to be able to visit Albania at some point in the future. I have been told it is an absolutely beautiful country.

