

THE EIGHT MONTH INVESTIGATION INTO THE JANUARY 6 INVESTIGATION DIDN'T END IN MARCH

I was going to hold off responding to this Spencer Ackerman op-ed in the NYT – which attempts to superimpose conclusions of his book onto ensuing events that have disproven some of his predictions – until I finish a half-written review of the book itself (tl;dr: it's a great history of the war on terror, but entirely unpersuasive as to its main argument and especially sloppy when it attempts to discuss politics). But I got a bit fed up by the way he claims to be speaking about the response to January 6 with an op-ed that doesn't incorporate anything more recent than March.

“Eight months later, there is no political response to the insurrection at all,” – Spencer claims, linking an article dated March 26 reporting, “Dem Hearings Bend Over Backward to Ignore GOP Complicity in Capitol Riot –“only a security response aimed at its foot soldiers.” That's his most recent reference in the entire op-ed, as demonstrated by the links he uses:

Elissa Slotkin: [2/1/21](#)

Somali plot: [1/25/19](#)

Somali plot: [10/14/16](#)

Mike Flynn: [7/9/16](#)

Trump on terrorism: [8/15/16](#)

Trump's birtherism: [9/19/15](#)

How the January 6 insurrectionists saw themselves: [1/5/21](#)

Veterans: [2/4/21](#)

Non-veteran Mariposa Castro declaring war: 1/21/21

Describing the Jan 6 investigation based on what Michael Sherwin's comments about sedition, while ignoring what he said about holding everyone accountable:
1/13/21

[Sherwin's resignation: 3/23/21]

Trump sent them: 1/9/21

Opting against 14A: 2/3/21

Dems on empowering the FBI: 2/5/21

DOJ seeking new domestic terror powers:
2/26/21

Slotkin again on monitoring domestic extremists: 3/23/21

"I am not a terrorist:" 1/13/21

Spencer makes no mention of any of the developments you'd look at to understand how the Biden Administration was responding to January 6, including:

- A new domestic terrorism response that includes social media monitoring of the sort that might have prevented the attack on the Capitol, but few of the other things Spencer and others have never stopped predicting since January 6.
- A discussion of the actions of the January 6 Select Committee, on which committee Elissa Slotkin (the Democrat Spencer quoted

twice and on whom his book focuses) doesn't sit. The committee has provided a way around the need to placate Republicans trying to avoid angering Trump, to say nothing of committees (like the House Oversight Committee) packed with key figures in the events of January 6. The committee has already moved to obtain the records of the people that Spencer claims have escaped accountability.

- A description of Merrick Garland's repeated comments, starting in his February 22 confirmation hearing and continuing since, that DOJ would go where the evidence leads, including to those who incited it. Garland's DOJ has also found important ways to avoid sheltering Mo Brooks (and by association all other people who were Federal employees the day of the riot, as Trump was), and to waive executive privilege to allow multiple investigations into Trump's actions to proceed.
- How DOJ under Merrick Garland and Lisa Monaco has approached the January 6 investigation, notably with

its use of the unpoliticized obstruction statute to charge felonies rather than (thus far at least) sedition, the use of interlocking conspiracies that have already started incorporating some organizers and which could easily be used with Trump and his flunkies, and the possibility of terrorism enhancements that would be decided at sentencing, by judges, rather than by categorical application at the start of investigation.

There are definitely ways that the two decade war on terror played a big role on January 6.

More important than the 22 veterans charged by early February is which figures in the organizing conspiracies applied their military experience to ensuring the success of the operation. Key among those is former Staff Sergeant Joe Biggs, who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan before he went on to play a key propaganda role in the 2016 election; as I've described, Biggs was at the head of both major fronts (East Side, West Side) of the attack, and his network incorporates the key organizers of the larger event. Charles Donohoe, Dominic Pezzola, Gabriel Garcia, Jessica Watkins, and Joshua James are other veterans who allegedly turned their war on terror training to play key roles leading an attack on the Capitol. The second front of the attack on the Capitol that Biggs seemed to have anticipated was opened – either coincidentally, or not – by a bunch of Marines, including one on active duty.

If you're going to talk about the import of the

war on terror on January 6, you also have to talk about the mental scars that veterans have brought back. That was made spectacularly clear by Landon Copeland's PTSD-driven meltdown in a detention hearing. But even Jacob Chansley's mental illness has ties to his service. These two are not alone among the men and women whose service scars led them to embrace the false promises Donald Trump was offering.

In his book, Spencer rightly complains about the Wanted Dead or Alive rhetoric motivating the War on Terror. He also complains about an, "obsession with the baroque, fragmentary details of what became #Russiagate," (mistaking the equally baroque counter-propaganda hashtag for those focusing in varying degrees of obsessiveness on the investigation itself) that nevertheless ended with Bill Barr corruptly intervening to protect Trump. But Spencer apparently feels the best way to deal with something else – a plodding, but ambitious, attempt to conduct a law enforcement investigation from the attack itself to its kingpins – is to largely ignore it even while claiming to speak for it.

The January 6 investigation, even in conjunction with the Select Committee, will not fix all the problems with the War on Terror. The two together may not hold the most powerful culprits for January 6 accountable – but that's not for lack of ambition to do just that. But – in large part because this is an investigation of mostly-white people, which goes to the core of how America's racism and other demons almost brought down its democracy and still could – it looks more like how the US should have responded to the 9/11 attack and not the caricature that Spencer arrives at by ignoring the last six months.

Following 600 cases as DOJ meticulously obtains the camera footage to see how Alex Jones lured unwitting participants to a second front or attempts to document whether key militia members made an attempt on Nancy Pelosi's life is not

sexy. But it's what Spencer claims we should have done in response to 9/11.