

II. Interview

In Conversation with Morten Storm: A Double Agent's Journey into the Global Jihad

Interviewed by Stefano Bonino

This interview with former double agent Morten Storm can serve as a unique case study for academics and security practitioners wishing to understand the turbulent path that led a young Danish man to turn into a Muslim, later on embrace violent jihad, and ultimately work for four different Western intelligence agencies in the War on Terror. The interview identifies the struggles of a man in search of identity and belonging. It provides unique insights into the world of violent jihad and offers an understanding of the key role played by double agents in disrupting international terrorist networks. The interview further highlights the operational challenges inherent in cooperating with different Western intelligence agencies and the personal challenges underpinning undercover operations.

About Morten Storm

Morten Storm was born in Korsør, Denmark, on 2 January 1976. He was raised in a turbulent family and quickly became immersed in the criminal world: drugs, armed robberies and prisons were a daily reality for the young Dane. A member of the *Bandidos* motorcycle gang at 19, two years later he converted to Islam in a Danish prison, moved to England and then traveled to Yemen, where he learnt Arabic and was drawn into jihadism. Between 1997 and 2006 Storm divided his time between Denmark, England and Yemen and befriended some of the most senior leaders of al-Qaeda (such as Nasir al-Wuhayshi and Anwar al-Awlaki), the radical preacher Omar Bakri Mohammed, 9/11 terrorist Zacarias Moussaoui, the 'Shoe Bomber' Richard Reid and many other violent jihadists. A sudden change of heart led Storm to privately abandon Islam in 2007. Yet, publicly, he maintained his jihadi persona while working on joint missions for Danish, British and American intelligence agencies: the Politiets Efterretningstjeneste (PET); the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6); and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Storm travelled the world, gathering information on al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups and helped Western authorities prevent several murderous attacks. Storm's most important task involved helping the CIA track and assassinate his friend Anwar al-Awlaki. After securing a \$250,000 reward for setting up al-Awlaki with a Croatian wife but failing to lead the CIA to al-Awlaki, in 2011, Storm went on his last mission, worth a \$5 million reward. Storm was to help the CIA track al-Awlaki by arranging meetings with al-Awlaki's couriers. Al-Awlaki was eventually killed on 30 September that year but the \$5 million reward never materialized. Storm claims that it was his intelligence that led to the death of al-Awlaki. In October 2012 he went public with his story in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. In 2014 the International Spy Museum in Washington opened an exhibit on Morten Storm. Today, Storm is hiding in fear for his life.

Stefano Bonino (SB): *Can you tell me a bit about your story in terms of your path from being a member of the 'Bandidos' to converting to Islam?*

Morten Storm (MS): I grew up with no dad and always felt frustrated and angry. In my teens, I took up boxing, took drugs and started committing armed robberies for the adrenaline. In 1995, at 19, I joined the *Bandidos* in Denmark. In 1997, I was the president of the *Bandidos* in Korsør and Slagelse: I ended up in jail for six months for assault. I was rearrested while on remand for armed robbery but the charges were dropped. I decided that I wanted to become a better person so I left the biker gang and went to Milton

Keynes in England. I became a Muslim. At that point, in 1997, I was someone who did not have an identity, who did not have a higher purpose in life. What attracted me to Islam in the first place was the need to belong to something, as I did not have a good family. The turning point for me was reading a book on the life of the Prophet Mohammed that I found in the library in Milton Keynes. It made so much more sense than Christianity because God was not portrayed as a human and there was no Trinity. It was the monotheistic concept behind Islam that attracted me. For the first six months after I converted to Islam, I was so happy. Finally, I had a purpose in life. Praying everyday made me feel like I was forgiven for my sins. There was a family there for me: I belonged to a global community of 1.6 billion Muslims. They make you feel that you are one of them: the Pakistani community was a bit reserved but the Arabs and the Somalis were much more open. But if I had to say what motivated me to convert the most, I would say that, in the beginning, it was the 'social' aspect of Islam. Islam is a complete way of life. Everything is decided for you. When you use the toilet, you need to use it in a certain way. When you eat and drink, you need to do it in a certain way. When you have sex with your wife, you have it in a certain way. So everything is totally decided for you. A Muslim aims to do everything that the Prophet Mohammed did in his life and to emulate him. You have to imitate him. Later on, my motivation to be a Muslim changed when religion and faith took over the social aspect.

SB: *And then what happened?*

MS: During my time in England, I started attending Regent's Park Mosque. At the time I was not yet a fundamentalist Muslim, but Regent's Park Mosque was one of the reasons that turned me into one. The mosque is partly funded by Saudi Arabia and they follow Salafism or an orthodox form of Islam that adheres to the Hanbali school of thought. In North Africa there are the Maliki; in Asia there are the Hanafi; in Yemen there are the Shafi. They are all different schools of thought but they are all fundamentalist. A Saudi imam working at Regent's Park Mosque suggested that I should go to Yemen to study Islam. At that time, I was still quite ignorant about Islam: all what I knew was that there was a difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims! I accepted the offer and off I went to Yemen to study Islam in Dammaj. I quickly realized that there was more to Islam: it is based upon both the Koran and the Hadith. The Hadith explains how to understand the Koran. So I studied the six books of the Hadith. I became a fundamentalist: I started doing everything in life following the Koran and the Hadith. For me they were based on evidence rather than worship. I also learnt that a Muslim cannot like disbelievers even if they are his own parents. That is what I read and what I studied with others in Yemen. I learnt that the highest goal of Islam is to love for the sake of Allah and to hate for the sake of Allah. Everything that you do in your beliefs must be pure. Faith – or *iman* – must be manifested in your speeches and actions, not only in your heart. Once you are in there, it is so easy to become a fundamentalist. You become like a robot with no emotions. It is very easy especially if your previous life lacked a daily routine: Islam will make it for you. That is fundamentalist Islam. The two authentic books of the Hadith are followed by most of Muslims. After four months in Dammaj, I went to Sana'a where I met several Yemenis who had trained with al-Qaeda militants in Afghanistan. I also met one of Osama bin Laden's couriers. So I really started to know al-Qaeda members. In 1998, I moved back to Milton Keynes and attended hard-core mosques across London: I met Zacarias Moussaoui and Richard Reid, for example. Later, I started preaching to non-Muslims (*da'wah*). I used to preach in street corners, such as Oxford Street in London. I always used the argument that the Koran had never changed and had been protected against all contradictions while the Bible contradicts itself in many places and had been changed. That was my basic argument and I converted many people. For me, reading the Koran literally encouraged hatred, discrimination, intolerance and incitement to violence. I returned to Yemen in January 2001 to study in Sana'a and just a few months before 9/11 I received an invitation from Osama bin Laden to join him up in the training camps in Afghanistan. I did not go to Afghanistan but later in 2002, I named my son Osama in honor of bin Laden: he was someone who dared to challenge America. I understood before 9/11 that violent

jihad is part of Islam: it is the highest action you can perform. There is nothing compared to jihad in Islam. I knew that jihad was part of Islam but it was really after 9/11 that two camps emerged: Muslims became split between those who were practicing and those who were non-practicing. In Yemen, people were cheering for the attacks on America. Later, I raised money and recruited people to fight for the Taliban during the war in Afghanistan. In 2002, after my son was born, I returned to Denmark and then I moved to Luton with my family and started mixing up with followers of Abu Hamza, Abu Qatada and Omar Bakri Mohammed. So, for example, I burnt the American flag outside the American Embassy in London in 2005. I celebrated the bombings on London in 2005, although I was not too convinced about the killings of civilians. Then I met Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen in 2006. He was very different from the preachers in England. He convinced me to join the real jihad.

SB: *Surely you must have seen a difference between the non-violent fundamentalists and the violent ones?*

MS: We called the non-violent fundamentalists 'Saudi Salafis' because they were not 'real' Salafis. In 2005, I even wrote a book titled 'Exposing the Fake Salafis.' We made an e-book and distributed it all over. These 'fake' Salafis would quote the Hadith but not the full meaning of it. They would never speak about jihad. We considered the Saudi Salafis who opposed jihad to be hypocrites because they only wanted to believe some parts of the Koran. The 'real' Salafis and the jihadists would accept the Koran in full. But I definitely saw people from rich Saudi families who wanted to blow themselves up. They could not wait. They were seeking martyrdom. This is different from Japanese kamikazes or the Tamil Tigers who did it for nationalistic reasons. Jihadists do it for religious reasons.

SB: *How were violent jihadists recruited?*

MS: Initially, in the 1990s, jihad was mostly confined to Chechnya and there were training camps in Afghanistan. The big jihad had not started yet. People got recruited via books and imams, and especially via contacts, such as people who were linked to Osama bin Laden and to Afghanistan and to the mujahidin. These were people like Zacarias Moussaoui, Richard Reid and other people whom I befriended at the mosque. They were like-minded people who were fundamentalist and accepted violent jihad as part of Islam. You just met them in the mosque and had a few debates, a few talks. Then you wake up and realize that the Saudi Salafis only gave you half of the story. You have the full meaning of the Koran and the Hadith. All of the beheadings and all of the success stories of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Fallujah and other places were an incredible boost. Early on, we were a bit discouraged when the Taliban were pushed out of Kabul to the mountains. It felt as a defeat but now you look back and they are still fighting. It was just a tactical move. So many years later, it was a proof to the believers that the prophecy would be fulfilled and that an Islamic State would happen. Anwar al-Awlaki used to lecture about the fact that jihad in Syria would be revived and come back to life. At that time, in 2006, it was impossible to think that there would be an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Sure, in Iraq there was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi but in Syria Bashar al-Assad was too strong. But it happened. In 2006, al-Awlaki was saying it would happen and indeed it happened.

SB: *Did the violent jihadists that you met have direct links with established terrorist groups?*

MS: You do not necessarily need to have a direct link with a terrorist group to act. You only need to be motivated. Some of the people whom I knew would follow Abu Hamza al-Masri or Abu Qatada. Others would follow Somali imams. Others would go to the Saudi Salafis. But in a defensive jihad, you do not need an *emir*. That is one of the rules of jihad. You do not need to ask permission from a leader, from parents or from anyone. You can go and fight jihad. Some of the people whom I met never said anything. Taimur Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, an Iraqi Swedish man whom I knew in Luton later went to Sweden and blew himself

up. We used to study the Koran together during lessons and he was actually against jihad and al-Qaeda. I used to look down on him because I felt that he was a hypocrite. Then a few years later, he blew himself up. This was a time when so much literature was available that people were not excused by those like me for being ignorant: they could easily self-radicalize.

SB: *How did al-Qaeda operate when you were involved in it?*

MS: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was fairly hierarchical. You had an *emir* at the top. When I pleaded allegiance to al-Qaeda, I did it to Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. There is a hierarchy. In European groups, if there were three people, an *emir* had to be appointed. These were trusted people who spoke and acted on behalf of al-Qaeda. It was a connected network. The main goal of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was to eventually establish a Caliphate worldwide. Anwar al-Awlaki used a Hadith that talks about the 'army' of Yemen, which would rise, enter Rome and build an Islamic State. Al-Awlaki used to say that we were in a defensive jihad and we had to fight by any means necessary. There was no 'contract of peace' in place and any such contract between the Muslim world and the West would be invalid anyway. Muslim leaders who had made agreements with the West were considered to be traitors as they had no authority over Muslims. The goal was also to weaken the economy of the Western world: for example, the attacks on London in 2005 cost a fortune to the British government. For many of us, taking welfare benefits from the British government was also part of jihad because it weakened its financial system. We were also encouraged to take money from the disbelievers. Breeding and outnumbering the disbelievers was part of a strategy and a long-term project too. For us, it was about having a foot in the country, expanding mosques, converting people to Islam and one day eventually Islam would spread like a cancer and take over the country.

SB: *How much talk was going on about Western military involvement in Muslim countries during your time spent in Yemen?*

MS: Jihad came up because of Western involvement in Muslim lands. Verses of the Koran were recited when Afghanistan and Iraq were being invaded. The Koran orders a reaction to invasion. Most of the *khutbah* or Friday prayers mentioned Israel or the American invasion of Iraq. They also discussed the atrocities of women and children being killed. Then there were the scandals of Abu Ghraib, people being randomly killed and so on. Islam would be used to justify the fact that those deaths warranted jihad. That is where religion says that it is an obligatory duty to fight jihad and protect Muslim lands from transgressors. The Prophet Mohammed promised punishment for those who do not go forward. It is in the Koran. For these people, it is a matter of being rewarded in the hereafter. The justification is that if you attack a Muslim country, you attack Islam.

SB: *Going back to your own conversion to Islam and your path to fundamentalism, why did you decide to disengage and leave Islam in the end?*

MS: I had a big problem with Islam: the idea of preordained divine destiny was always nagging me throughout. It was one of the reasons that made me question Islam in the end. At that time, in 2006, I also wanted to join jihad in Somalia. President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed had just been overthrown and sharia law was being implemented. Somalia was to become the first real Islamic state and so it was the duty of every Muslim to support the cause. Jihad is the noblest cause and Muslims would be punished for not taking part. Many Danish and American friends had gone there to fight. So, I gathered military supplies in Denmark and said goodbye to my children. But just a couple of days before departing, they called me from Somalia saying that they lost the airport in Mogadishu to Ethiopian troops and I could not go any longer because it was too

dangerous. I was so angry and I thought ‘why would Allah stop me?’ I felt so betrayed: the incident made me seriously question Islam. It made me question the religion. I googled ‘contradictions in the Koran’ and, to my surprise, I found hundreds of them. What shocked me even more is that the Koran had been changed and had been corrupted from its origins. I lost all faith in Islam immediately.

SB: *But you did not just leave Islam. You switched sides and ended up working for four different Western intelligence agencies. Why did you do that?*

MS: I switched sides because I left Islam. I had been approached by intelligence agencies several times and refused their offers. Chapter 5, verse 51 of the Koran says: ‘O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies in one another.’ There are many other verses in the Koran that tell Muslims not to cooperate with non-Muslims. But, I understood how much hatred and intolerance were in Islam. Jihadists would have killed me if they had known that I was no longer a Muslim. But for me, it became a duty as a human being to fight the jihadi ideology so I contacted the Danish intelligence. They had already tried to recruit me. I called the same phone number and we arranged a meeting. I told them that I was no longer a Muslim. I told them that I wanted to eat some bacon and drink a beer—they could not believe it!

SB: *Was money a factor in your decision to work for intelligence agencies?*

MS: Money was not my motivation. Many spies who work for intelligence agencies do it for the money. My drive was to see change and do something good. At the beginning, the pay was about \$1,500 a month, about 10,000 Danish Koruna. I used a company called Storm Building Construction as a cover for the income. The payments that I received barely did more than cover my bills but I never complained: I knew that I was doing the right thing. Knowing that I was making a difference was my real reward.

SB: *And what exactly was your role?*

MS: I believe that my role was both (1) collecting and passing information and (2) disrupting terrorist groups. We prevented terrorism, we prevented people from travelling to Denmark, we prevented shooters from spraying bullets like recently in France, we stopped a plot in the United Kingdom. We had information on the plans of both al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula because I was a facilitator in Somalia and Yemen. We knew what they were planning and we had an idea of what they would do next. But I was also an analyst for the intelligence agencies. When I was not abroad, I would sit with experts from intelligence agencies and teach them the ideology and methodology of the different groups, such as the difference between the Taliban and al-Qaeda. You need to understand that the Taliban follow the Hanafi school of thought, while al-Qaeda follows the Hanbali school of thought. Rules for jihad are different between different schools of thought.

SB: *But how did you see your role in the grander scheme of things? Did you think that you were playing a central role in the operations in which you were involved?*

MS: When your intelligence reaches President Obama, you know that you are reaching high levels. Several people whom I knew in Somalia, Kenya and other places in Africa were terrorist leaders. Especially after 2009, when we took out Saleh Ali Nabhan, the one who was behind the terrorist attacks on the American Embassy in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, I understood that I had significant power to change things and take revenge for people who had been hurt. So I felt that my work was reaching very high levels. I never returned home without information. It was from my mobile phone and my house that I linked al-Shabaab with Anwar al-Awlaki. This is written in the history books now. Without my knowledge about how these people think, we would not have been able to predict things. When you have to make people in Somalia or

al-Awlaki speak, you have to manipulate them. And you can only do that if you know their mentality and what they believe in. I studied Islam and I knew what motivated and drove these people. It all depends on what you want them to do. I would argue with al-Awlaki in our email communications. I would call some people disbelievers while he would call them believers. It was challenging because I could have fallen out with him but I needed to do it to show that I had my own opinions. The CIA said that I could not do it but my way turned out to be much better. The CIA and most intelligence agencies do not have real knowledge. You only have real knowledge when you live with these people and are part of the group.

SB: *How easy was it to penetrate al-Qaeda's highest command?*

MS: For me, it was relatively easy because I was already trusted and tested. The weird thing is that I had done things and managed to bump into people whom I later discovered were quite high-ranking. I had met the mujahidin in 1998 much before I met Anwar al-Awlaki through mutual friends in Yemen in 2006. I already had my name out there and never had to prove anything. That was one of my benefits. I never had to change myself. As an agent I later pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. I was playing a game. They knew that I had conditions. For example, I had difficulties with killing civilians and that is when Nasir al-Wuhayshi told me that if he were given a choice between civilians or military targets, he would choose military targets. Infiltrating an intelligence officer is much more problematic than using insiders because he would be tested. In Western countries we can use human intelligence and train agents to infiltrate terrorist cells. But, for an intelligence officer to infiltrate terrorist groups abroad, there would be some tests: being sent to the frontline, killing people and so on. It is very dangerous for an outsider to enter a terrorist group and work his way up to the ranks. He needs to participate in terrorist activities. The *Islamic State* is one of the most difficult terrorist groups to penetrate. Once you are out there, you are not allowed to get back. So most agents who travel over there think that they will come back but they will not. A Danish friend of mine, a Muslim convert, who decided to work with Danish intelligence, was killed. He was sent to the frontlines, to the worst places, where it is most likely that you get killed. That is a way to test if you are a true believer. You can certainly train people in the West to infiltrate the *Islamic State* but, if you want to really protect minorities in the Middle East, military intervention, not espionage, is the only real solution.

SB: *What other tactics do you think that work well in the field?*

MS: Female spies are very useful because they can speak to the female members of a terrorist network. This gives you a complete understanding of any person that you want to target. So, for example, a female spy talking to Anwar al-Awlaki's wife would be able to offer a picture that complemented my own assessment of him. It enriched my understanding of the man. Intelligence agencies rarely have both angles of the personality of a key terrorist. Also, foot soldiers are never told the plans before they are ready. A facilitator – the role I played – is in a better position to get information. Leaders need to see a benefit in you as a facilitator and, unless they can do that, they will not speak to you about anything. But once they ask you for something, you can find out what their plans are. When al-Awlaki asked me to bring some hexamine tablets, we knew that these were to make detonators.

SB: *How did you end up targeting Anwar al-Awlaki?*

MS: In the beginning the task with Anwar al-Awlaki was just to collect information. In fact, the CIA were not interested in him. Later, they realized how dangerous al-Awlaki was and that my predictions were accurate and my work useful. I predicted a jihadi uprising in Lebanon. I helped to identify terror suspects in Denmark. I delivered a bugged blackberry to Saleh Ali Nabhan [*an al-Qaeda operative wanted for his suspected role in the 1998 US Embassy bombing in Nairobi*] who would be killed three months later. The

mission moved from collecting information to taking al-Awlaki out. The CIA sent me to meet up with him in Yemen in October 2008, a month after the attack on the American Embassy in Yemen. I had to bring him a laptop, solar panels and a night-vision goggle that he requested: some were planted with spy software. I also gave him \$5,000 cash from the CIA. Al-Awlaki asked me whether he could buy guns with the money and I said 'yes.' My Danish handlers later told me that I had been tested and passed the test. Refusing him to use the money to buy guns would have been an indication that the money was from an intelligence agency: terrorists know that intelligence agencies cannot pay for weapons. I stayed in touch with him by email. We shared an email account where we would save messages as draft to be read but not sent so as to avoid intelligence agencies reading them. When I met him back in 2009, he was more concerned about security. He would not use electronic tools, such as the Internet or mobile phones. He asked me to use encrypted message software called 'Mojahedeen Secrets' which was used by al-Qaeda members around the world. On another stay in Yemen in 2011 there were two couriers involved in passing messages to him: al-Awlaki trusted them but they were low rank and expendable.

SB: *That is very interesting. How much operational independence did you have in the field?*

MS: British intelligence, for example, had to tick boxes. They would tell me 'when you go to Yemen you have to do A, B and C.' They wanted to tell *me* what to do in Yemen! I would fold their paper and throw it away. I would do the exact opposite. They would tell me 'when you go out of the airport, turn right.' I would turn left and that would generate the best intelligence. I was acting totally independently. I improvised. I designed, planned and executed the missions. More or less I did whatever I wanted to. At the beginning the Danes just gave me two plastic bags with mobile phones saying 'here are your mobile phones.' I knew nothing about mobile phones – I could hardly use a laptop. I had to pretend to sell drugs and had to make a fake drugs sale in front of some of my mates to show my source of income. But it was myself improvising it. All what I had from the intelligence agencies was approval and funding. I could do anything I liked. Sometimes there were goals in terms of collecting certain information or meeting an operative, and I always did it and came back with more. Not only would I come back confirming that two people were connected but I could tell the whole story. I could also train and recruit people. I trained a former British Royal Marines reserve and made him become a Muslim. He wanted to make a difference. Initially, I did not tell him who I was. I asked him 'are you sure that you want to make a change?' He said 'yes.' I checked his mentality and I thought that he could definitely be used in the War on Terror. I suggested that he infiltrated groups and became a useful person for the intelligence agencies. So, I spent my own money to train him. There was no authorization. It was all my own initiative and, in fact, the Brits stopped it in the end.

SB: *What other operational liberties did you have?*

MS: If I was in Yemen and I was asked to execute a prisoner to prove my loyalty, I was given permission by British intelligence to do it. I was also trained in weapon handling by the Danish Special Taskforce. I was not trained to shoot al-Qaeda members but government soldiers. The only reason you have to refrain from shooting is if you face American soldiers. But I could shoot Yemeni soldiers even if they were fighting the same exact war against al-Qaeda. If I did kill an American Muslim, I needed to do a so-called 'elevator meeting,' where I had to disclose the killing but I would not be prosecuted. I had in these respects a license to kill but I was not there to actively kill people.

SB: *And did you encounter any particular operational challenge?*

MS: A main challenge was traveling through checkpoints. I had to negotiate at each checkpoint. I am not talking about bribes but I had to argue. My wife would be with me so we would say that we had to visit her

family. I had travelled illegally through Yemen and in outlawed areas before meeting my wife. But it was easier with her. Also, when I arrived to a Muslim country and had to wear Middle Eastern clothes it was very weird. So stepping in and out of character was quite difficult. On the airplane on my way from the UK to Yemen, I would listen to Metallica to wind myself up. But as soon as I arrived in Yemen, that music would be off and I would step into the character. Sometimes, I had three or four characters in one single day: being Murad; being a dad to my kids, so not influencing them in an Islamic way; being a bushcraft instructor; and, then, being a husband. It was like trying to find out who I was. Sometimes it was really difficult. The easiest of all of the four identities was being a Muslim because that is what I had been for ten years. It was the easiest side of me but, at the same time, it was an act because I did not believe in it any more. In fact, it was just a memory. It was hypocritical when I said *Inshallah*, *Alhamdulillah* or *Subhan Allah*, which have a religious meaning and purpose. I also had to pray. Imagine when I had to pray with other guys. I just did not believe in it at all in my heart. I did the movements and totally acted. But I think that I did very well in maintaining cover. You need to maintain a certain interest in these people or they will know that you are a spy. Often spies make a mistake because they are not fully integrated in the beliefs of these people. I could argue with al-Qaeda members but I would do it in a religiously sound way that would be justified and would give me some space.

SB: *Did you face any particular personal challenge as a double agent?*

MS: My real difficulty was to find who I was in my private life. I had to live with that emptiness of never believing in myself. I had different personalities and different names: Morten Storm, Murad Storm, Abu Osama, Abu Mujahid, Polar Bear, Dalmar and so on. It is a crazy lifestyle. It was very difficult in the beginning but now I am totally comfortable. Things have settled. But at that time, from going to believe that there is certainty in your life the day after, to afterwards not believing it, it was very empty. The double life was very difficult and very stressful. Especially after terrorist groups started launching attacks in the West, it was very difficult to realize that you are responsible for another human life. I am proud of what I did but I do not feel happy about people being killed. You ask yourself the question: is there anything I could have done to prevent the attacks? I could only speak with one psychiatrist from MI5 but he did not really do much for me. I started using cocaine to numb the reality of my life and I developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Instead of getting higher, I would get low on cocaine, otherwise my brain would overdrive. It was self-medicating. Every time that I drove my kids back to their mother, I did not know whether I would see them again. If I had died, they would have thought that I was a terrorist. These are some of the things that continue to haunt me today. You are an agent but you receive no recognition or respect in the end.

SB: *Did you ever tell anyone that you were working as a double agent?*

MS: I told my mother, two of my best friends and two friends from my outdoor company to whom I paid a salary every month with my own money. My mother believed it but my friends thought that it was a lie. I wanted them to know that I was no longer Murad and I was Morten. But they were non-Muslim because I would never trust Muslims, even if they were non-practicing. I could not afford to 'gamble' with Muslims. I introduced one friend to my radical network in Denmark and they thought that he was just a guy who was working for me. I asked him to mention that the outdoor company was going really well and he did it.

SB: *Who else knew about your undercover work?*

MS: The only other people who knew about me were my handlers and the chiefs of intelligence plus some IT experts from the CIA whom I met in Copenhagen. Also, a few people within IT in the British intelligence knew me because they wanted to teach me some things with the laptop: for example, how to hide information

so that it could not be found unless you know how to do it. A few instructors in the Danish military intelligence also knew who I was although they did not know the details of my mission. But they are clever because you do not exist: on the receipts my name was 'Ali G.' and people in the system would not know who I was. If I were killed in the field, they would have no reference.

SB: *How did you actually manage to work with four different intelligence agencies at the same time?*

MS: I did not have loyalty to any intelligence agency or country. I am a free-thinking human being and I myself judge what is right and wrong. For this reason, intelligence agencies understood that I was a loose cannon. They understood that I would not be loyal. As much as they were using me to gather information, I was using them to combat evil: I could not do it all on my own. But I was not there to dance to the music. I was there to deliver sound information and make serious change.

SB: *But how could they trust you?*

MS: The security services never had any doubt. I never lied to them because we would end up in a situation where we lacked trust. I was so honest that, if I made a mistake, I would correct myself. I genuinely believed that this was my call. But after calling the Americans 'terrorists' during a meeting with CIA and MI6 in Copenhagen because of a strike that had killed civilians, the Americans asked the Danes whether I was at risk of reverting to Islam again. I was just honest about my opinions and I did not want to be a hypocrite. But during almost six years of work with intelligence agencies, they became like a family. I constantly had three handlers from Danish intelligence and two handlers from British intelligence. I could call them round the clock to speak with those to whom I wanted to speak. The Americans were never directly in contact unless we were meeting up in Denmark or in the UK.

SB: *Did the four intelligence agencies have different priorities?*

MS: There were differences in how to proceed and how to achieve the goals. The Americans are cowboys, if I can say so. I really mean it. They think that they can buy your loyalty with money. They have no knowledge about the things that they do. Their interest is to get people killed and to buy loyalties. Once they have what they want from you, they drop you out. The methods of reaching those goals would even include sending people into danger. The Brits are more calculating and patient. It is much more about gathering information, analyzing and preventing. The Danes were a joke. They were just there to party. They feel important about sitting at the important tables but they were just there to serve coffee during meetings with the CIA and the Brits.

SB: *But did they operate differently?*

MS: Well, when the Brits pulled out of the mission with Aminah [*details below*] and Anwar, the Danes told me that I should go with the Americans. 'Forget the Brits, it is more fun with the Americans,' they said. These intelligence agencies used to bad mouth each other the whole time. The Brits hated the Americans. The Danes looked down on the Brits because they are too formal and too bureaucratic while they [*the Danes*] were more freestyle. The Americans were into money and it was more like an action movie. But these intelligence agencies do not trust each other. It was difficult for me because I really liked the Brits more than the others. They never broke one promise. They would never promise something that they could not fulfill and they would never say 'yes' unless they meant it. They were interested in me getting a career out of it unlike the other agencies that just wanted to use me and considered me disposable. I chose the Americans because of the Danish government and because of the opportunities of an adventurous experience. If I had chosen the Brits, I would probably still be working for them. They spent money to train me. They never

trained me with weapons, which the Danes did. But the Brits trained me in roleplaying, which was more useful. But there were some operational differences. It was a big experience to see the difference between the various intelligence agencies. Certain things were not allowed by the Brits but were allowed by the Danes because they worked with the Americans. So, I had to go to Denmark to do this kind of things. For example, once the Brits gave me a laptop to provide to a terrorist so that information could be extracted, but when I arrived in Denmark the Danes took the laptop away and gave me an American laptop. They were almost working against one another.

SB: *Was there any aspect that you particularly enjoyed about your work?*

MS: The good parts were going back and giving information, seeing the enjoyment and surprise on the faces of my handlers, how they got excited because they could see that we were getting higher and higher. But I also liked the excitement of travelling to different countries. I also found it amusing when low-ranking counter-terrorism officers at airports stopped me: I used to play around with them. They would not know who I was. Once, I was returning from Yemen and they tried to interrogate me: they wanted to recruit me without knowing that I had already been recruited. I sat in an interrogation room where they were telling me that Islam is a peaceful religion and I told them ‘no, you are absolutely wrong!’ They were very surprised and then they asked me to help. I responded ‘no’ [laughs]. The government never told these lower-ranking people that I was working for them because they were scared that the information could spread. The funding is also unlimited. If I wanted to justify going to Kenya or to Thailand or to Indonesia, they would just fund it without questioning. To see the Americans and the Brits fight over me, flatter me, try to buy me with trips to the ice hotel in Iceland, just to see how desperate they were to have me on their team – that was very empowering.

SB: *Did you ever have any doubt about your covert work?*

MS: I was never in doubt about my covert work, but I had two issues. I had to lie to people whom I used to call friends and I worked to have them killed. About thirty people were killed. You do not arrest these people. It was difficult for me because I understood why they did those things. I understood their motivations. They believed those were the right things to do. When you are on their side you know how generous they are. They would give their lives to protect you. It hurts a lot to betray them. The other difficult thing for me was to work with the government and the police. I come from a background where we would never speak with the police but deal ourselves with problems within our own community. In my pre-Muslim life with the *Bandidos*, I never answered police questions. They had tried for six years, but I never ever said a single word to them. I had difficulties in explaining to myself that I was cooperating with Danish authorities.

SB: *Did you have many frictions with the intelligence agencies that you were working with?*

MS: Sometimes, they were naïve. I set up al-Awlaki with a third wife, a Croatian Muslim convert called Aminah. The CIA’s plan was to plant a tracking device in her luggage so that it would lead them to al-Awlaki in Yemen. When I had to meet Aminah in Vienna, the Americans had set me up with all surveillance ready into a pub. They had no clue. She is a Muslim and the CIA asked me to meet up with her in a pub. I changed the plan and took her to a McDonald’s instead. The CIA were really angry and thought that I went rogue. But in the end, it went well and we took her to Yemen. I was paid \$250,000 from the CIA for that mission. I spent half of the money setting up my covert outdoors company, Storm Bushcraft. I wanted to run something in Kenya and similar places where I could still be semi-involved but not ‘full-time.’ Perhaps we could have prevented the Westgate attack because my contact there – Ikrimah [*a top al-Shabaab commander whose real*

name is believed to be Abdukadir Mohamed Abdukadir] – was later involved in it. I used the rest of the money to buy cocaine because I could not deal with the stress.

SB: *How did your relationship with intelligence agencies deteriorate in the end?*

MS: The Americans refused to speak with me for six months after Aminah's plan failed. I managed to get her to Yemen, but she was told by al-Qaeda operatives to dump the suitcase before she met with al-Awlaki. So, the CIA did not manage to track al-Awlaki. Six months later, the Danes texted me saying that they had completely lost track of al-Awlaki and the Americans needed my help again. They promised a \$5 million reward for eliminating him. But after we took him out, the CIA said that his death was not due to my work. My Danish handler, Klang, sent me a message saying 'I'm so sorry but it wasn't us.' Several days later, I picked up a copy of *The Telegraph*. It said that al-Awlaki was tracked by capturing a low-level errand-runner. The dates, the time-period when he was arrested, and the fact that the courier was a young man all matched with my mission. I was very angry! Danish intelligence offered me £225,000 to keep silent. I was poor and did not know how to survive but I still refused. I remained poor, but at least I kept my dignity. I made up with Danish intelligence a few months ago but then fell out again after they failed to deliver on a promise that they had made.

SB: *What sort of support have you received since leaving the field?*

MS: I receive no personal support or security details. In the summer of 2013, members of the Islamic State shot at pictures of myself and other five Danes in Syria. I cannot move back to Denmark, because it is too difficult. I cannot get a name protection or any protection from the Danish government. You can pay £5 and you get access to protected addresses, so I would be dead within six months if I moved back to Denmark. The UK is much safer, because you do not have to register where you live. I live under different names anyway.

SB: *Morten, thank you very much for this interview.*

About the interviewer: **Stefano Bonino** is a Lecturer in Criminology at Northumbria University and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

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Interviewer's Notes

This interview formed part of a Northumbria University approved project entitled 'Disrupting Terrorist Groups: An Agent's Perspective.' The original face-to-face interview was conducted at an undisclosed location in the United Kingdom in November 2015. Parts of the interview were subsequently re-arranged and integrated with publicly available information included in the CNN Special Report 'Double Agent Inside al Qaeda for the CIA' aired on 16 September 2014 and in the article 'Morten Storm: A Radical Life' published in *The Telegraph* on 3 December 2012. Morten Storm confirmed the resulting, edited interview presented here to be an accurate description of his experiences and views in January 2016.

Morten Storm's story has been neither confirmed nor denied by the Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service and the Central Intelligence Agency. The interviewer and author of this text, Stefano Bonino, was not in a position to establish contact with any of these intelligence

agencies to verify the claims made in this interview. However, the book *Agent Storm: My Life Inside al Qaeda and the CIA*, which Morten Storm co-authored with Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister for Atlantic Monthly Press in 2014, provides evidence for several of Storm's claims. Readers wishing to explore some episodes referred to in this interview in more detail are advised to consult the book.