

In this day in age, we are not remotely deprived of movies dealing with terrorism. Yet while the movie industry is littered with titles that dive deep into the depths of terrorism, they all seem to lack something making the genre incomplete. Whether it is the director's attempt to enlighten the viewer about his favorite political message or an attempt to make the movie a marketable action flick, we, the viewer, tend to give up substance for explosions and accurate factual information for unnecessary political rhetoric.

With this in mind, I skeptically picked up The Siege, a movie starring action main stays Bruce Willis and Denzel Washington, collectively with Annette Benning and Tony Shalhoub of "Monk" fame. After viewing this movie, I can proudly say that finally there is a movie that bridges the gap between being an action movie and at the same time not allowing the action to drown out the story line.

As the opening credits roll, we are taken to newsreel images of terrorist attacks on different U.S interests throughout the world. Since this movie was filmed in 1998, we are then flashed clips of President Bill Clinton's stance on terrorism before being taken to the first of many terrorist attacks we will see throughout the movie: The terrorists are perpetrating their first of many attacks on the streets of New York City by attaching an explosive device to a commuter bus. As the FBI are informed of this situation Agents Anthony Hubbard (Washington) and Frank Haddad (Shalhoub) rush to the scene of the incident hoping to thwart this terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

It is from this perspective that most of the movie is taken: The FBI hears of a situation involving terrorists and attempt to put the pieces of the puzzle together in time to prevent the next attack from happening. Throughout the FBI's journey, they are aided by Sharon Bridger,

(Bening) a woman whose character slowly unravels throughout the entire movie when we finally understand her true place in the film. It is with Bridger in tow that Agents Hubbard and Haddad play a very complex game of cat and mouse with the terrorists, attempting to maintain law and order in New York City, while at the same time protecting the rights of the innocent Muslim population.

While this movie does not dive into the realm of bioterrorism, it illustrates very effectively the panic and possible reactions that could occur in the event of a bioterrorist attack. As New York City becomes a virtual punching bag for the Palestinian terrorists, numerous legal issues come to light, especially as Hubbard's FBI Counterterrorism unit's effectiveness comes into question. In viewing this film, the issue that comes to be the most prevalent is whether in the event of a terrorist attack would our nation respond in a similar manner?

At one point we find Bridger (Bening) criticizing the actions of Hubbard (Washington) for waiting too long for a search warrant, while Hubbard (Washington) justifies his actions by stating that he is simply upholding the constitution. Ultimately the search warrant is in the hands of Haddad (Shalhoub). This scene provides an interesting look at how the writer portrays the CIA as an organization intent on combating the enemy regardless of constitutional constraints, while the FBI is seen as trying to follow the law which ultimately allows more attacks to occur as a result of their slow reaction time. This appears to be one of the central themes behind this movie (especially in a movie made before 9/11) in the question: as United States citizens, would we be willing to give up the freedoms and liberties granted to us by our constitution for greater protection against terrorist threats? On one side, we appear to have FBI Agent Hubbard, who as Bridger so eloquently puts it, received his law degree in night school, and on the other (after the

second attack on NYC) we have Willis' character, Major General William Devereaux, who soon implements his own means of combating terrorism.

As attacks continue and fear builds, more legal discussions enter the fray, namely the possibility of using U.S. Military Troops to protect our people in NYC. This leads the characters, namely Devereaux (Willis), into a discussion with a Congressional subcommittee on the actions that could be taken by the President invoking the War Powers Act, declaring martial law, and allowing the military to enter Brooklyn in an attempt to find the last terror cell. Hubbard (Washington) conveys his belief that the army's presence in NYC will only inhibit his counterterrorism team's ability to find the terrorists, and even at one point Devereaux agrees with Hubbard in a congressional meeting calling the army "a broadsword and not a scalpel." This leads the Congresswoman present at the hearing to quote *Ex Parte Milligan*, 71 U.S. 2 (1866), and further open a dialogue discussing the *Posse Comitatus* implications of sending the military into NYC. In discussing *Milligan*, the Congresswoman notes that President Lincoln's suspension of Habeas Corpus was found to be unconstitutional as a result of the *Milligan* holding, when in fact the *Milligan* court ruled more specifically that the suspension of habeas corpus rights from a U.S. citizen was improper because the civilian courts were still in operation, thus there was no need for a military tribunal. It is interesting to note that the courts have looked at this issue on a few different occasions since the *Milligan* holding, notably in *Ex Parte Quirin*, 317 U.S. 1 (1942), in which the court upheld the use of military tribunals to detain, hold trial, convict, and execute unlawful combatants in times of war. It is further important to note that the Congresswoman stated that *Posse Comitatus* arose out of issues stemming from the United States Civil War.

Further in this legal sequence the Congresswoman contended that the sending of American troops to police our own was a violation of “established legal doctrine...*Posse Comitatus*.” In this, she correctly notes that the role of the military is not to enforce the laws of the land, and further that American troops are not to be turned against the American people.

It is at this point that the movie makes the transformation from a typical search for the terrorist film, reminiscent of George Clooney in The Peacemaker, into a suspenseful thriller dealing with social, political, legal, and moral issues. As the government contemplates sending troops into New York City, from a legal perspective, issues arise that range from those of a first year Constitutional law course all the way to an advanced course in National Security Law. We see the evil head of *Korematsu* appear from the rubble of One Federal Plaza and, ultimately, a resurgence of all moral and ethical questions that this infamous case posed in 1944. The atrocities do not end there, and in hopes of not spoiling this fantastic movie, it is imperative to state that the legal viewer will also get a steady dose of human rights issues to further perpetuate the idea that the use of military in the war on terror in our own cities might not be the best approach to take.

As these legal issues resolve themselves, and Hubbard, Haddad, and Bridger continue their race against the clock to find the last terrorist cells while preventing another terrorist attack from occurring in the Big Apple. Be prepared for an action packed ride that is not short on action or legal value. Denzel Washington’s role as Special Agent Hubbard is very similar to numerous other roles he has played in the past. In playing the by-the-books FBI agent, Washington exhibited many of the same characteristics that allowed him to light up the screen in The Bone Collector, namely his intent to get to the bottom of this crime before more lives are lost.

To compliment Washington, the director made a great decision casting Tony Shalhoub as Special Agent Frank Haddad. This role is one of the more difficult roles in this film, and I feel as though Shalhoub played it to perfection. As the viewer watches the film they will witness Special Agent Haddad deal with inner conflict and struggle between whether to keep fighting for the laws he swore to uphold or to fight for solely his own personal interest.

In casting Annette Bening as Sharon Bridger, I feel as though the director probably made the best decision he made throughout the entire movie. Bening is no novice to parts in films dealing with our government (The American President), and does an excellent job playing a conflicted agent of a certain government agency. To a degree, she must play the most hated character in the movie, other than terrorists, because we know she knows more than she is telling us. But, her loyalties to Samir and her knowledge of how the terrorists work, force her to not reveal too much information, which leaves the viewer angry with Bening for a majority of the movie. In the end, Bening plays a serious role that is worthy of acknowledgment and ultimately is the unsung hero of this cast of stars.

Lastly, it is necessary to look at Major General Devereaux, played by Bruce Willis. During Willis' career, he has played almost every part imaginable, and in this film he perfectly exemplified the arrogance that was necessary to play Devereaux. In playing this part, Willis had to be serious, articulate, and most importantly, not show his true intentions. Willis successfully wore a mask through a major portion of the film, only to have this mask removed rather unceremoniously in the latter minutes of the movie. I have seen almost every Bruce Willis movie imaginable, and this by far has been his best role.

Ultimately this movie is a must see for anyone interested in counterterrorism. In directing this film, Edward Zwick returned to his days of directing Glory. His combination of

special effects in the guise of explosions, moral dilemmas, and social cause made this movie very enjoyable from both an action perspective and an intellectual perspective. One of the elements of this film that I must note as being very appropriate was the music played throughout the film. Unlike your traditional action film with overbearing rock or rap music, the director layered in throughout the entire movie Middle Eastern music giving this film a unique vibe. As we explore a dimly lit city, we are shown that all is not well in the night. Yet it is not the images of fire that haunt the viewer's dreams, but instead the Middle Eastern music leading us to the scene of the next horrible crime. It is also crucial to note the tremendous special effects seen throughout the film, most notably in the scenes involving terrorist attacks. These terrorist attack scenes might have been made a bit more realistic by the 9/11 attack. The cinematography focusing on the victims and their pain was both well thought out on an emotional basis and a realistic basis.

In conclusion, I feel as though this film was a fantastic adaptation of the basic search for the terrorist flick. Those wishing to view this movie as a bioterrorism film will see possible analogies to terrorist's operatives and methodologies portrayed in the film. Any person watching this film with a remote interest in National Security Law will be pleasantly surprised. The legal foundation of this movie is well researched. The actors are superb, and the plot is original considering the large volume of movies in this genre. If you are searching for a movie that is compelling from a legal perspective as well as an interesting fictional perspective of counterterrorism work from the inside, this film should be on the top of your list.



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