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## SEAL Team 6, the CIA and the secret history of U.S. kill missions in Afghanistan

By Dan Lamothe

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As the U.S. military focused heavily on the Iraq war in 2006, the general in charge of the secretive Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) noticed something alarming: The Taliban was regrouping in Afghanistan, and the United States didn't have the manpower there to stop it.

That commander, then-Lt. Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, responded by unleashing the Naval Special Warfare Development Group — popularly known as SEAL Team 6 — on a variety of missions in which the unit wouldn't have typically been involved, according to an investigative report published by the New York Times on Saturday. Some of those operations resulted in civilians being killed, several former SEALs said in interviews, according to the report.

“No figures are publicly available that break out the number of raids that Team 6 carried out in Afghanistan or their toll,” the Times reported. “Military officials say that no shots were fired on most raids. But between 2006 and 2008, Team 6 operators said, there were intense periods in which for weeks at a time their unit logged 10 to 15 kills on many nights, and sometimes up to 25.”

The report, long-rumored in the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence world, details the evolving use for the elite force that is one of America's most revered but least understood. It also notes the lack of oversight team members receive. Among the details reported:

### **SEALs and the CIA's Omega Program**

SEAL Team 6 members joined with the CIA in something known as the Omega Program, which hunted down Taliban fighters with fewer restrictions than other military units, the Times reported. Together, they performed "deniable operations" in Pakistan using a model with similarities to the Phoenix Program, a Vietnam-era effort in which Special Operations troops performed interrogations and assassinations, the newspaper reported.

The existence of Omega teams has been reported previously. In September 2011, The Washington Post's Greg Miller and Julie Tate reported that "omega" units comprising CIA personnel and troops with JSOC were using co-mingled bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen. The story noted that on at least five occasions, they had ventured into Pakistan.

Those employed in Afghanistan were "mostly designed against specific high-value targets with the intent of looking across the border" into Pakistan, a former senior U.S. military official said in an interview at the time about the "omega" teams. They wore civilian clothes and traveled in Toyota Hilux trucks, rather than military vehicles, the officials added. That story did not report that SEAL Team 6 specifically was involved.

### **Little outside oversight**

The Times reported that there are numerous instances in which SEAL Team 6 members have been accused of killing civilians during raids, spawning investigations by JSOC. A "half-dozen" former members of the unit told the Times they were aware of civilian deaths that the team had caused.

"Do I think bad things went on?" one former officer told the newspaper, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss classified operations. "Do I think there was more killing than should have been done? Sure."

That same person added that there was a "natural inclination" to kill what were perceived as threats but that he doubted SEALs intentionally killed people who didn't deserve it.

One example raised was a 2008 operation in Afghanistan's Helmand province in which a Taliban official identified as Objective Pantera was to be taken out. Numerous allegations were made that civilians in the village involved were killed, prompting a SEAL Team 6 commander, Navy Capt. Scott Moore, to ask for a JSOC investigation, the Times reported.

JSOC cleared the SEALs involved of any wrongdoing in the Pantera operation,

the Times reported, citing two unnamed team members. But SEALs were sometimes sent home from deployments when concerns about questionable killings were raised, the story added.

### **Tomahawks used in combat**

Some SEAL Team 6 members used specialized tomahawk axes in raids, and at least one SEAL killed an insurgent with one, the Times reported.

The newspaper quoted one former team member, Dom Raso, who said the tomahawks were used for breaching doors, in hand-to-hand combat and for other roles.

According to the Times, one former senior enlisted SEAL said: “It’s a dirty business. What’s the difference between shooting them as I was told and pulling out a knife and stabbing them or hatcheting them?”

At times, the SEALs cut off fingers or patches of scalp from dead militants so that DNA analysis could be performed, the story adds. It does not specify which weapons were used to do so.