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Dirty War in Afghanistan

by Douglas Valentine
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On the morning of Dec. 30, 2009, I listened in disbelief as an NPR "terrorism" expert disingenuously explained how the suicide bombing that killed seven CIA employees in Afghanistan was especially hideous, because the CIA victims were spreading economic development and democracy through a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).

CIA Director Lou Panetta issued a statement saying, "Those who fell yesterday were far from home and close to the enemy, doing the hard work that must be done to protect our country from terrorism." President Obama likewise glorified the CIA officers, calling them "part of a long line of patriots who have made great sacrifices for their fellow citizens, and for our way of life."

On New Year's Day, *Washington Post* staff writers Joby Warrick and Pamela Constable began to fill in some of the blanks that the initial propaganda had ignored. Warrick and Constable reported that the seven CIA officers were "at the heart of a covert program overseeing strikes by the agency's remote-controlled aircraft along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border."

In the past year, those strikes have killed more than 300 people (perhaps as many as 700) who are invariably described by the U.S. news media as suspected insurgents, or militants, or terrorists, or jihadists – or as collateral damage, people killed by accident. There is never any distinction made between Afghan nationalists fighting the U.S.

occupation of their country and real terrorists who have inflicted intentional violence against civilians to achieve a political objective (the classic definition of terrorism).

Likewise, the U.S. news media describes the Dec. 30 attack on the CIA officers as "terrorism," although it doesn't fit the definition since the CIA officers were engaged in military operations and thus represented a legitimate target under the law of war, certainly as much so as Taliban commanders far from the front lines.

One such commander, Jalaluddin Haggani, was said to have ordered the suicide attack from his base in North Waziristan in retaliation for drone strikes on his forces. Haggani, a former CIA ally during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, also has close ties to Pakistani intelligence. Curiously, the bomb used in the suicide attack has been linked to the Pakistani intelligence service. It is unclear, however, if Haggani arranged for the bomb to be delivered to suicide bomber Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, the Jordanian agent whom the CIA summoned in the belief that he had information as to the whereabouts of a top Al Qaeda official.

What is clear is that Al-Balawi sacrificed his life to help to drive Americans from Islamic nations like Afghanistan, where they cause so much death and misery. The mainstream media describes people like Al-Balawi as irrational "jihadists" with no appreciation for the fact that Americans are merely "defending" their "interests" in the region.

In the broadest sense, Al-Balawi's suicide attack was retaliation for the murder of thousands of innocent Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, including ten civilians *in Ghazi Khan Village in Narang district of the eastern Afghan province of Kunar. The ten civilians were executed during a midnight raid on Dec 27 by what NATO called "non-military" (meaning CIA) American commandos.*

CIA commandos, often Green Berets and Navy SEALs hired into the CIA's Special Activities Division, do not wear uniforms in violation of international rules of land warfare. Instead they grow long beards and wear traditional Afghan garb and appear to be civilians. During the post-9/11 "global war on terror," these teams have engaged in widespread kidnappings and executions.

CIA commandos are "America's Einsatzgruppen", similar to the notorious Nazi death squads that hunted and terrorized partisans in the Russian countryside in World War Two. Other CIA commandos function like the Gestapo, terrorizing the resistance cells in urban areas. In both cases, their mission is to terrorize the civilian population into submission.

CIA Terrorism

NATO spokesmen initially labeled the ten victims in Ghazi Khan as "insurgents" belonging to a "terrorist" cell that manufactured improvised explosive devices used to kill occupation troops and civilians. But later reports from Afghan government investigators

and townspeople identified the dead as civilians, including eight students, aged 11 to 17, enrolled in local schools. All but one of the dead came from the same family.

According to a [Dec. 31 article](#) published by the *Times of London*, the CIA death squad flew by helicopter from Kabul, landing about two kilometers from the village. The commandos snuck up to the residence, taking the inhabitants by surprise as they slept. The commandos entered the first room and shot two of their victims – a guest and a student – then entered the second room and handcuffed seven other students, whom they executed in cold blood. When the farmer with whom the students were staying heard the shooting and came outside, the commandos killed him too.

Protests over the killings erupted throughout Kunar Province, where the deaths occurred, as well as in Kabul. Hundreds of protesters demanded that American occupation forces leave the country, and that the murderers be brought to justice.

A NATO spokesman claimed there was "no direct evidence to substantiate" the claims of premeditated murder. And yet, the record of American forces engaging the first degree murder of unarmed people in Afghanistan and Iraq is a long one, with testimony about premeditated executions even emerging in U.S. military disciplinary hearings.

These types of "unilateral" (done without informing any Afghan nationals) CIA "covert actions" are increasing in frequency with Obama's surge of 30,000 additional U.S. troops into Afghanistan. Of course, this ratcheting up of the cycle of violence will only incite more and more revenge killings. Indeed, the CIA immediately vowed to avenge the murder of its colleagues. Typically, a public statement of revenge such as this is an invocation of the notorious 100-to-one rule employed by the Nazis: anytime the partisans killed a member of the Gestapo or Einsatzgruppen, the Nazis killed 100 innocent civilians as punishment.

In the meantime, the surviving CIA personnel at Forward Operating Base Chapman have barricaded themselves inside their compound and are grilling the Afghan employees who were on duty at the time of the Dec. 30 bomb attack. Afghans who worked with the CIA on the outside are locked out.

Given their elevated status and class prerogatives, CIA officers do not perform menial tasks, and every chauffeur, maid, and vendor will now be seen as a potential "double agent." This apprehension will spread (as the suicide bomber and his masters intended) from the bottom to the top: Afghan officials in the US-backed government knew little about unilateral CIA operations at FOW Chapman to begin with, but now, as mutual mistrust reaches unprecedented levels, they will have less input and the war will enter a bloodier phase reminiscent of the pacification of Iraq.

The Face of Terrorism – Provincial Reconstruction Teams

The events of the past week are instructive in explaining how CIA covert operations are conducted in concert with the U.S. news media.

Few Americans were aware that FOB Chapman was a CIA base camp. The local Afghans, however, were well aware of this fact. They also knew that the CIA used the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) based at Chapman as a means of gathering – from informants, secret agents, and field interrogations – intelligence upon which to coordinate super-sophisticated drone attacks and crude paramilitary operations.

Composed of Afghan and US forces, the PRTs have been a foundation stone of the CIA's secret government in Afghanistan since they were instituted in 2002 under the imprimatur of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. As with all the entities the CIA has created in Afghanistan, the PRTs are entirely funded by the CIA, and staffed with collaborators under CIA control.

Naturally, the suicide bombing has cast doubt on the integrity of the intelligence the PRTs produce for the CIA. Agents of the resistance have infiltrated the program and the PRTs are certainly going through an internal review. But they will not be abandoned, and so it is instructive to know how they are organized and how they operate.

The PRTs provide CIA agents – usually Afghans working in the PRTs – with a covert way to recruit and meet sub-agents (informants) in the field. CIA "officers" run "agents" in the field and these Afghan agents in turn run "sub-agents" – people in villages like Ghazi who spy on other people in the villages.

The CIA managers of the PRTs also rely on interpreters, as well as Afghan "counter-parts" in the secret police and military to determine if the intelligence given about "suspects" in a particular village is reliable. This leap of faith carries considerable risk. If a sub-agent in a village or an agent in the PRT is a double, a CIA death squad can easily be misdirected against innocent civilians. Likewise, a drone strike could be directed against an enemy of Jalaluddin Haggani's within the resistance.

The PRT "counter-terror" mission is to identify members of the resistance. The sub-agent tells the PRT agent where the suspect lives in the village, how many people are in his house, where they sleep, and when they enter and leave the house. He also provides a picture, if possible. Other times a PRT agent will attempt to blackmail the suspect into becoming an informant, if there is reason to believe that is possible.

The PRT also has a "foreign intelligence" mission, which involves collecting intelligence on Taliban leaders and their Al Qaeda contacts in foreign nations, like Pakistan.

Obviously, al Qaeda and the Afghan resistance are aware of the CIA's activities, and this fact casts suspicion on the CIA's interpreters and counter-parts in the Afghan police and military. All of this puts increasing pressure on the CIA to separate itself entirely from the untrustworthy, ungrateful Afghans it has come to liberate.

The CIA's Provincial Reconstruction Teams are at the center of this dilemma. Although it bills the PRTs as a means of spreading economic development and democracy, the CIA is not a social welfare program: its job is gathering intelligence and using it to capture,

kill or turn the enemy into agents. The PRTs are a means to achieve these goals – but only as long as the CIA can plausibly deny that it does so. Thus, the two main purposes of PRTs are 1) maintaining the fiction that the US is a force for positive change and 2) providing the CIA with cover for its dirty business.

As the CIA tightens its security measures, and as the Obama administration moves to reactivate some of the most brutal and corrupt warlords who fought the Soviets in the 1980s, the PRTs and their "community defense forces" will become increasingly reliant on criminals and sociopaths – agents who have no compunctions about pursuing unilateral CIA policies and goals that are antithetical to Afghanistan's national interests. And that spells trouble for the CIA.

The Origins of PRTs in Vietnam

Much of this bloody strategy was tested during the Vietnam War. In the early 1960s in South Vietnam, the CIA's Covert Action Branch developed the programs that would, in 1965, be grouped within its Revolutionary Development Cadre program. The standard Revolutionary Development Team was composed of North Vietnamese defectors and South Vietnamese collaborators advised by U.S. military and civilian personnel under the management of the CIA.

The original model, known as a Political Action Team, was developed by CIA officer Frank Scotton. The original PAT consisted of 40 men: as Scotton told me, "That's three teams of twelve men each, strictly armed. The control element was four men: a commander and his deputy, a morale officer, and a radioman."

"These are commando teams," Scotton stressed, "displacement teams. The idea was to go into contested areas and spend a few nights. But it was a local responsibility so they had to do it on their own."

"Two functions split out of this," Scotton added. First was pacification. Second was counter-terror. As Scotton noted, "The PRU thing directly evolves from this."

The PRU, for Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, was the name given in 1966 to the CIA's "counter-terror" teams, which had generated a ton of negative publicity in 1965 when Ohio Sen. Stephen Young charged that they disguised themselves as Vietcong and discredited the Communists by committing atrocities, including murder, rape and mutilation.

Notably, propagandists like Mark Moyar, a professor of national security affairs at the Marine Corps University, advocate for the expansion of PRU-style counter-terror teams in Afghanistan. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[A Bad Vietnam Lesson for Afghanistan.](#)"]

Staffing is a crucial element of this "political action" strategy, and to this end Scotton developed a "motivational indoctrination" program, which is certainly used today in some

form in Afghanistan and Iraq. Scotton's motivational indoctrination program was modeled on Communist techniques, and the process began on a confessional basis.

"On the first day," according to Scotton, "everyone would fill out a form and write an essay on why they had joined." The team's morale officer "would study their answers and explain the next day why they were involved in a *special* unit. The instructors would lead them to stand up and talk about themselves." The morale officer's job, he said, "was to keep people honest and have them admit mistakes."

Not only did Scotton co-opt Communist motivational techniques, but he also relied on Communist defectors as his cadre. "They could communicate doctrine, and they were people who would shoot," he explained, adding, "It wasn't necessary for everyone in the unit to be ex-Vietminh, just the leadership."

Indeed, the Vietnamese officer in charge of Scotton's PAT program, Major Nguyen Be, had been party secretary for the Ninth Vietcong Battalion before switching sides.

In 1965, Scotton was transferred to another job, and Major Be, with his new CIA advisor, Harry "The Hat" Monk, combined CIA "mobile" Census Grievance cadre, PATs, and Counter-Terror Teams into the standard 59-man Revolutionary Development (RD) team.

Census Grievance Teams were the primary way RD agents contacted sub-agents in the villages – by setting up a portable shack in which civilians could privately complain about the government. The PRTs very likely have this Census Grievance element in their intelligence unit.

Major Be's 59-man Revolutionary Development teams were called Purple People Eaters by American soldiers, in reference to their clothes and terror tactics. To the rural Vietnamese, the RD teams were simply "idiot birds."

In mid-1965 the RD Cadre Program was officially launched and teams were sent across South Vietnam. With standardization and expansion came the need for more advisers, so Thomas Donohue, the CIA officer in charge of Covert Action in South Vietnam, began recruiting military men. Most came from US Special Forces, though the regular army, navy and marines also provide support personnel as "detailees" to the CIA.

"We got to the point," Donohue told me, "where the CIA was running a political program in a sovereign country where they didn't know what the hell we were teaching. But what kind of program could it be that had only one sponsor, the CIA, that says it was doing good? It had to be sinister. Any red-blooded American could understand that. What the hell is the CIA doing running a program on political action?"

"So I went out to try to get some cosponsors for the record. They weren't easy to come by. I went to [USIS chief] Barry Zorthian. I said, 'Barry, how about giving us someone?' I talked to MACV about getting an officer assigned. I had AID give me a guy."

But all of it, Donohue said, "was window dressing. We [the CIA] had the funds; we had the logistics; we had the transportation."

The same can undoubtedly be said for the PRTs in Afghanistan and Iraq.

PRTs in Iraq

The CIA's RD Cadre program in Vietnam has been cloned into the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq. The PRT program started in Afghanistan in 2002 and migrated to Iraq in 2004.

PRTs consist of anywhere between 50 and 100 civilian and military specialists. The standard PRT has a military police unit, a psychological operations unit, an explosive ordinance-demining unit, an intelligence team, medics, a force protection unit, and administrative and support personnel.

Like Scotton's teams in South Vietnam, they conduct terror, political, and psychological operations, under cover of fostering economic development and democracy. Long ago the American people grew weary of the heavily censored but universally bad news they got about Iraq, and are now quiet happy to believe that PRTs have put Iraq back on its feet. Americans are quite happy to forget about the devastation they wrought.

But few Iraqis are fooled by the "war as economic development" shell game, or by the deceitful standards the US government uses to measure the success of its PRT program.

In his correspondence with reporter Dahr Jamail, one Iraqi political analyst from Fallujah (a neighborhood that was destroyed in order to save it) [put it succinctly when he said](#): "In a country that used to feed much of Arab world, starvation is the norm."

According to another of Jamail's correspondents, Iraqis "are largely mute witnesses. Americans may argue among themselves about just how much "success" or "progress" there really is in post-surge Iraq, but it is almost invariably an argument in which Iraqis are but stick figures – or dead bodies."

In a publication titled "Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience," the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction describes its mission as the largest overseas rebuilding effort in U.S. history.

In some places in Iraq unemployment is at 40–60 percent. Repairing war damage was the policy goal, but little connection was made between how the rebuilding would – or even could – bring about a democratic transition. As in Iraq, the PRTs in Afghanistan are a gimmick to make Americans feel good about the oppressive occupations conducted for their benefit. The supposed successes of the PRTs are cloaked in double-speak and meaningless statistics.

After all, achieving statistical progress is not hard in nations whose

infrastructures were destroyed by invasion and occupation, and where entire neighborhoods have been leveled in the name of security. The hard truth is that the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq always have been less about combating Islamic "terrorism" and "protecting the homeland" than about projecting the dark side of the American collective psyche.

Protecting the People from the Knowledge of CIA Terrorism

Protecting Americans from any knowledge of the horror their government inflicts, is the job of the mainstream media. Its propagandists will not tell you that the CIA has a policy of targeting civilians for recruitment as agents and informants, or that it intentionally detains, without charge, and interrogates civilians as a means of coercing information from them about the Islamic resistance to American aggression. Civilians are knowingly killed and maimed in drone attacks, as well as raids by CIA commandos, as a means of terrorizing the people from associating in any way with the resistance.

It is the job of mainstream propagandists to disguise this policy and characterize these civilians as either members of the enemy infrastructure, or jihadists, and thus legitimate military targets.

Another thing you will not read about is the accommodation that normally exists between the opposing elites in any war. This accommodation exists in the twilight zone between reality and imagination, in the fog of war. It is why officers are separated from enlisted men in POW camps and given better treatment. It is why officers of opposing armies have more in common with one another than they have with their own enlisted men.

Officers are trained to think of the lower ranks as cannon fodder. Officers know when they send a unit up a hill, some men will be killed. That is why they do not fraternize with the lower ranks. This class distinction exists across the world, and is the basis of the accommodation. It is why the Bush family flew the bin Laden family, and other Saudi Royals, out of the United States in the days after 9-11. If anyone was a case officer to the 9-11 bombers, or had knowledge about the bombers or any follow-up plots, it was these "protected" people.

CIA officers too are among the Protected Few. Blessed with false identities and bodyguards, they fly in private planes, live in villas, eat fancy food and enjoy state-of-the-art technology. CIA officers tell army generals what to do. They direct Congressional committees. They assassinate heads of state and innocent children with equal impunity and indifference.

In Afghanistan they manage the drug trade from their hammocks in the shade. They know the Taliban tax the farmers growing the opium, and they know that Karzai's warlords convert the opium into heroin and fly it to the Russian mob. They are amused by the antics of earnest DEA agents, who, in their patriotic bliss, cannot believe such an accommodation exists.

CIA officers are trained to exist in this moral netherworld, for the simple reason that the CIA in every conflict has a paramount need to keep secure communication channels open to the enemy. The CIA, as part of its mandate, is authorized to negotiate with the enemy, but it can only do so as long as the channel is secure and deniable. The mainstream media makes sure that no proof will ever exist, so the American public can be deceived.

But every once in a while, something disrupts the accommodation. Take Iran Contra, when President Reagan publicly vowed never to negotiate with terrorists, then secretly sent a team of spies to Tehran to sell missiles to the Iranians and use the money to buy guns for the drug dealing Contras.

There are stated and unstated policies, and the CIA exists to pursue the government's unstated policy. And without an accommodation in Afghanistan, the CIA would not have a secure channel to the resistance to negotiate on simple matters like prisoner exchanges.

The exchange of British journalist Peter Moore for an Iraqi in CIA custody is an example of how the accommodation works in Iraq. Moore was held by a Shia group allegedly allied to Iran, and his freedom depended entirely on the CIA communicating secretly and in good faith with America's enemies in the Iraq resistance. The details of such prisoner exchanges are never revealed by complicit assets in the media, but the same channels of communication are used to discuss issues of strategic importance vital to any eventual reconciliation.

The Afghans want reconciliation. Apart from US policy, Karzai and his clique at every level have filial relations with the resistance. And no matter how powerful the CIA and its doppelgangers in al Qaeda are, they cannot overcome that.

Ed Brady, an Army officer detailed to the CIA in Saigon in 1967 and 1968, explains how the accommodation worked in Vietnam.

While Brady and his Vietnamese counterpart Colonel Tan were lunching at a restaurant in Dalat, Tan pointed at a woman eating noodle soup and drinking Vietnamese coffee at the table next to them. He told Brady that she was the Viet Cong province chief's wife. Brady, of course, wanted to grab her and use her for bait.

Coolly, Colonel Tan said to him: "You don't understand. You don't live the way we live. You don't have any family here. You're going to go home when this operation is over. You don't think like you're going to live here forever. But I have a home and a family and kids that go to school. I have a wife that has to go to market.... And you want me to go kill his wife? You want me to set a trap for him and kill him when he comes in to see his wife? If we do that, what are they going to do to our wives?"

"The VC didn't run targeted operations against them either," Brady explains. "There were set rules that you played by. If you went out and conducted a military operation and you chased them down fair and square in the jungle and you had a fight, that was okay. If they

ambushed you on the way back from a military operation, that was fair. But to conduct these clandestine police operations and really get at the heart of things, that was kind of immoral to them. That was not cricket. And the Vietnamese were very, very leery of upsetting that."

The CIA relies on such clandestine operations in Afghanistan, but only among working and middle class families, in an effort to rip apart the fabric of Afghan society, until the Afghan people accept American domination, through its ruling class. And that, ultimately, is why CIA officers were targeted. It has played a double game, violating the accommodation on the one hand, and exploiting it on the other.

The CIA is utterly predictable. As programmed, it will go on a killing spree until its vengeance is satisfied. But at the end of the day, the Afghan people will only hate the Americans more. And that spells defeat for the CIA and America.