

Obama's Dirty War

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In his Nobel Peace Prize speech, President Barack Obama declared "we're in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from spreading throughout that country." The phrasing signals that his war escalation will follow the dictates of what the CIA calls political and psychological warfare, the cornerstones of counterinsurgency.

By viewing this "cancer" as a political and ideological threat – as much as a military one – the U.S. counterinsurgency strategies will merge violence against armed enemies with attacks on their unarmed supporters, as has happened in such conflicts around the world, from Indochina to Latin America to Africa.

In Algeria, the French dubbed their counterinsurgency "la sale guerre," the dirty war, due to its reliance on terror to coerce the civilian population into submission. The elements of dirty war traditionally include murder, kidnapping, torture, disappearances and the total disruption of the nation's political, cultural, and economic infrastructure.

Obama's Dec. 10 speech in Oslo also marked an important juncture for him as he took on the job of selling a counterinsurgency war in Afghanistan, which has already been stained by the blood of thousands of innocents killed in bombing raids that targeted militants mixed with non-combatants.

Obama's speech is being hailed by prominent U.S. neoconservatives who believe they have surprisingly found in the young President a far more effective spokesman for their interventionist cause than the inarticulate George W. Bush.

"The shift in rhetoric at Oslo was striking," observed neocon theorist Robert Kagan in a Washington Post op-ed. "Gone was the vaguely left-revisionist language that flavored earlier speeches, highlighting the low points of American global leadership — the coups and ill-considered wars — and low-balling the highlights, such as the Cold War triumph."

Indeed, in his speech, Obama shoved six decades of those bloody low points behind one five-word clause, "whatever mistakes we have made."

Obama seems to have shouldered the job of salesman for the war in Afghanistan. But it is not necessary for Obama to win the support of the majority of the American people for the war since many Americans simply will rally around the flag and support the troops.

Obama and his national security team are also aware that public opinion can change if the war is not won quickly enough. Thus the public must be made to feel there is an on-going, urgent need for the war.

So, Obama packages the war as a cure for cancer. He makes it a matter of personal

survival, like chemotherapy and radiation that take a terrible toll on the patient's body, but are necessary for the patient's survival.

The public will suffer what it is told is the cure for what ails Afghanistan, if it believes the cure will dispel fear and insecurity in America.

Beyond relying on fear and patriotism, Obama's war council knows that public confusion is helpful. Most Americans don't have the time to learn the truth - in this case, that there is no "insurgency" or "counterinsurgency," but rather a resistance movement by Afghan nationalists - especially among the Pashtun tribe - to American military occupation.

What Is Counterinsurgency?

In his recent speeches, President Obama defines America's objectives in Afghanistan as: 1) suppressing the Taliban and national resistance forces to American occupation and the Karzai regime; 2) eliminating several score members of Al Qaeda; and 3) creating a stable pro-American government and economic infrastructure.

David Galula, author of *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (RAND Corporation, 1964) and a recognized authority on the matter, stresses that counterinsurgency includes "building or rebuilding a political apparatus within the population."

In this sense any counterinsurgency is, in reality, an insurgency. In Afghanistan, the Taliban ruled for several years until the U.S. and the CIA-backed Northern Alliance drove them out.

Obama may define the Taliban as the insurgents, but the Taliban, who control many parts of Afghanistan, view the Americans as backing an insurgency against Taliban rule.

Gen. Stanley McChrystal's military strategy for defeating the Taliban is to "protect the people from terror" through the tactic of "clear and hold."

To "clear and hold" means to drive the Taliban out of their secure areas in the countryside, which Obama proposes to do through his "surge" of 30,000 troops, and then occupy those areas while systematically killing enough Taliban and nationalist forces (in urban areas as well), so that they no longer resist the occupation.

The model for this "clear and hold/surge" strategy is Iraq. According to the conventional wisdom that dominates Official Washington, President George W. Bush's 2007 "surge" and the "clear and hold" strategy "won" the war in Iraq.

The reality may have been much different - with a variety of factors including paying off Sunni tribes in 2006 and the grudging U.S. agreement in 2008 to withdraw from Iraq playing bigger roles in the drop in violence - but that is not what Washington's influential neoconservatives and their allies want people to believe.

For instance, Establishment journalists Evan Thomas and John Barry at Newsweek explain that "clear and hold" works because it protects the "friendly civilians" who provide the intelligence that enables CIA and U.S. Special Forces to precisely find and kill members of the resistance and Al Qaeda.

"By ratcheting back the heavy use (and overuse) of firepower," they claim, "McChrystal has reduced civilian casualties, which alienate the locals and

breed more jihadists.”

However, the reality is far less humane and clinical.

First, the assertion that a counterinsurgency war is gentler than the shock and awe of, say, the Iraq invasion is false. It is more a psy-war argument intended to deceive a target population in, say, the United States into thinking that innocents are not being killed.

Second, the assertion that only “jihadists” are targeted for assassination is another deception. In fact, thousands of people are fighting not for religious reasons, but for nationalist reasons – Afghans opposed to American invaders and their collaborators.

Third, the notion that civilians provide information because they are “friendly” to the Americans is misleading, since most intelligence is coerced or simply bought.

The Newsweek correspondents, however, are correct when they say that Obama’s war is modeled on the CIA’s Vietnam-era Phoenix Program, whose goal was to “target and assassinate Viet Cong leaders.”

Waging a successful dirty war depends on identifying and killing enemy leaders – both combatants and non-combatants – as well as spreading disinformation as to who is the enemy and why they are being killed.

As is well known, the CIA developed the Phoenix Program in Vietnam as the ultimate, systematic means for fighting a dirty war, encompassing both counterinsurgency and counter-terror.

The CIA and U.S. Special Forces have further refined the Phoenix Program over the past 40 years. Phoenix-style operations have become the weapon of choice in the “global war on terror.”

Intelligence

Intelligence is gained primarily through 1) informants, 2) detainees, 3) interrogations, 4) defectors, 5) electronic intercepts, 6) agents involved in surveillance and theft of documents (etc), and 7) the insertion of penetration agents inside the enemy infrastructure.

1) Voluntary civilian informants typically work for money, ideology or personal reasons like vengeance; more often civilian informants are coerced – they have debts, secrets or are simply framed and given no choice. Coercing informants is the CIA’s strong suit.

2) Detainees only provide coerced information – in an effort to escape a jerry-rigged legal system in which Americans deny them due process. Producing informants and detainees is one of the major means that occupiers employ to rip apart – through suspicion, fear, confusion and divided loyalties – a nation they wish to control.

3) In the Afghan conflict, interrogations are conducted largely by members of the Afghan National Army (ANA) or the Afghan secret police (KHAD) under the supervision of their counterpart CIA and U.S. military officers in jointly managed facilities. “High Value” targets captured in unilateral U.S.-directed Phoenix operations are interrogated by CIA and U.S. military intelligence personnel in secure (off-limits to Afghans) facilities.

The CIA and U.S. military purchase from individuals members of the corrupt the Karzai government the right to operate secret unilateral interrogation and detention centers, as well as the right to use unilateral CIA and U.S. Special Forces paramilitary teams to target, capture and kill resistance members.

After eight years, America's secret detention and torture centers are due to be handed over to the Afghan secret police. Suspects will hereafter appear before "review boards" which will afford them a slim chance to challenge their internment and present evidence of their innocence. Reporters and international human rights officials may soon be granted access too.

Interrogation often is a word for torture. As reported in the Nov. 28 Washington Post: "Two Afghan teenagers held in U.S. detention north of Kabul this year said they were beaten by American guards, photographed naked, deprived of sleep and held in solitary confinement in concrete cells for at least two weeks while undergoing daily interrogation about their alleged links to the Taliban."

4) After interrogation, defectors are indoctrinated by former defectors who have repented. Defectors are made to prove their loyalty by serving as translators or interrogators, or by joining CIA-funded militias and paramilitary teams, and then sent back into enemy territory to contact Taliban and other resistance members and recruit more defectors.

5) Electronic intercepts are almost entirely unilateral, and are directed largely against the ANA, KHAD and Karzai government to detect double agents. Unilateral intercepts are also the method which U.S. security forces use to monitor the activities of corrupt and drug-dealing officials in the Karzai government. The CIA uses evidence of corruption to control these individuals.

6) The CIA and U.S. military run agents in liaison with the ANA and KHAD, as well as unilaterally, against the resistance and against the ANA, KHAD and Karzai government.

Recruiting agents is especially difficult in Afghanistan because the Taliban do not have politics, per se. They also are not capitalists and have not succumbed to the cash nexus. They do not have bookkeepers nor do they organize in Western-style hierarchies. They do not issue press releases, broadcast their plans and strategies, or allow photography (which can confound CIA assassins).

These ideological precepts make them nearly impervious to blackmail, extortion and corruption - the CIA's standard means of penetrating the enemy infrastructure, and the means by which it controls top-ranking officials in the Karzai government.

The Taliban will meet with foreigners to negotiate land and mineral rights, as well as form alliances - but they are loath to deal with Americans, which further hampers the CIA's ability to insert agents in its ranks.

In addition, the CIA and U.S. military gain intelligence about the Taliban, other resistance groups and Al Qaeda through translated documents, interrogations conducted through interpreters, and Afghan agents and informants. There is no way of knowing if this intelligence is reliable, but that does not much matter.

The main function of intelligence in a dirty war is to support U.S. policies, both stated and

unstated. Intelligence managers skew intelligence to this political purpose, as happened with the bogus reports of WMD in Iraq.

Any policy can find supporting intelligence, especially when the meaning of words is garbled by collaborators and indoctrinated employees who are required to report positively from the field, for their own survival and/or profit.

As one Phoenix Program veteran explained to me: "The Vietnamese lied to us; we lied to the Phoenix Directorate; and the Directorate made it into documented fact. It was a war that became distorted through our ability to create fiction."

Intelligence programs have two other major functions in a dirty war. One is to map out the clandestine organizations that drive the resistance, so they can be destroyed.

At the secret detention centers it operates in Afghanistan, the CIA draws up blacklists of Taliban and other members of the resistance based on their social and family ties, position within the infrastructure, age, sex and profession.

The idea is to send paramilitary teams out to capture them, make them inform on their comrades, turn them into double agents, or kill them and their families and friends. None have any right to due process.

Some instances of these death squad operations have surfaced during U.S. military disciplinary proceedings. For instance, in one case, an Afghani, identified as suspected insurgent leader Nawab Buntangyar was encountered on Oct. 13, 2006, by an Afghan army patrol led by U.S. Special Forces Capt. Dave Staffel.

While the Americans kept their distance out of fear the suspect might be wearing a suicide vest, the man was questioned about his name and the Americans checked his description against a list from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan, known as "the kill-or-capture list."

Concluding that the man was Buntangyar, Staffel ordered Master Sgt. Troy Anderson to fire from a distance of about 100 yards away, putting a bullet through the man's head and killing him instantly.

The soldiers viewed the killing as "a textbook example of a classified mission completed in accordance with the American rules of engagement," the International Herald Tribune reported. "The men said such rules allowed them to kill Buntangyar, whom the American military had designated a terrorist cell leader, once they positively identified him."

Staffel's civilian lawyer Mark Waple said the Army's Criminal Investigation Command concluded that the shooting was "justifiable homicide," but a two-star general in Afghanistan then instigated a murder charge against the two men. But that case foundered over accusations that the charge was improperly filed. [IHT, Sept. 17, 2007]

In Afghanistan, the CIA also focuses Phoenix-style teams on Taliban judicial officials operating religious law courts and assessing and collecting taxes; resistance members operating business fronts for purchasing, storing or distributing food and supplies, including farm products; public health officials who distribute medicine; security officials who target American collaborators and agents; officials in transportation, communication and postal services; military recruiters; and military leaders and forces.

The other major purpose of the intelligence programs is to understand how resistance leaders organize Afghans to cope with the violence the CIA and U.S. military are visiting upon them. Through opinion poll and surveys, the CIA tries to understand what drives people into the resistance or, conversely, into the arms of the corrupt Karzai regime.

Based on this attitudinal or socio-psycho-anthropological intelligence, the CIA seeks to establish its own parallel government, free of corruption, but modeled on Afghan sensibilities.

How to Disguise a Dirty War

The CIA forms its parallel government under cover of the U.S. State Department and its AID missions, in conjunction with the military. Again, psywar is the main ingredient.

Traditionally, Christian “missions” brought medicine and literacy to uncivilized native populations in Africa, North and South America, and Asia. In the process, the benighted natives were softened up for conquest, colonization and exploitation, no matter how well-intentioned the missionary.

Indeed, the more effective the missionary’s message, the softer the natives became.

The CIA through AID missions serves the same softening-up function today, though its Gospel is materialistic “economic development,” not the spiritual Word of God.

In either case – by accepting the outsider’s medicines, material goods and message – the natives tacitly accept the outsider’s authority. They are converted into a compliant workforce; recruited into the occupation army; become petty bureaucrats in the puppet government; and, most importantly, assist the internal security apparatus.

As with the Christian missionaries of old, the modern AID worker may be well-intentioned. But he or she is no less an agent of conquest.

As one U.S. aid worker in Afghanistan recently said to me: “The ANA [the Afghan National Army] is really good: people trust them and share intelligence with them, something they are not willing to do with internationals.”

Obviously, this AID worker does not acknowledge the Taliban as being Afghans.

Though I do not have enough information to cite a specific example about AID organizations in Afghanistan serving as CIA fronts, I’ll describe one that existed in Thailand during the Vietnam War.

In 1967 the CIA formed DEVCON, a component of Taylor Associates, a CIA proprietary company that marketed itself as a community development counseling service. DEVCON in turn sponsored the Hilltribe Research Center in Chiang Mai.

The CIA used the Hilltribe Research Center as a way of maintaining contact with agents and recruiting informants. As a cover for its espionage activities (and to baptize the natives in the cash nexus), the Center bought and marketed the handicrafts of native people in the area.

As part of the CIA’s parallel government in Thailand, the Center also employed teachers, agronomists, animal husbandry-men and engineers. These Thai nationals doubled as

intelligence agents and served as cut-outs to debrief the tribal people on insurgents and drug traffickers.

(The Hilltribe Research Center also famously employed Puttaporn Khamkhruan, a CIA agent who was arrested for smuggling opium to the United States. CIA agents in the Karzai government are most certainly following in Puttaporn's footsteps.)

As with the Thai employees of DEVCON, Afghans who collaborate with the CIA must inform on their countrymen, often directly to CIA officers who may be posing as AID workers. All AID workers and their Afghan counterparts are affiliated with the parallel government and are obligated to preach the party line: they refer to the resistance as "insurgents" in exchange for their prosperity and for their survival.

As the U.S. AID worker in Afghanistan told me: "Security comes before development. The wrath on informants [should the resistance prevail] will make the rape camps of Serbia look like picnics in the park."

The terror that accompanies collaboration enables U.S. Army "civic action" and "psywar" teams (often under CIA direction) to train Afghan converts how to build perimeter defenses around their villages.

When not administering medicine and forming militias, U.S. Special Forces units, having learned how to dress and act like natives, slip into the countryside at night and, using intelligence from their assets, "snatch and snuff" the local Taliban and resistance cadre. Urban units do likewise in cities.

Sometimes they also may engage in "black propaganda" activities, inflicting some outrage on the population that can be blamed on the enemy.

Instilling terror in the converted, as well as the resistance, is the main job of the counterinsurgent, his allies (and useful idiots) in the media, and aid workers: people whom author Graham Greene would describe as acting "like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm."

The critical importance of terror is well understood by the gurus at CIA headquarters. As former CIA Director William Colby said, "The implication or latent threat of terror was sufficient to insure that the people would comply."

As the prime apologist of the CIA's Phoenix Program, Colby knew the importance of wrapping American terror in humanitarian and educational packages and selling it to the public as "protecting the people from terrorism." That is exactly how he described Phoenix to Congress: as protecting people from terrorism.

It doesn't matter that many Taliban men, women and children may be pure in thought and deed, or that their motivations may be honorable, simply seeking to defend their homes from foreign occupiers.

Most do not participate in terrorism or even guerrilla action, and yet they and their sympathizers are dehumanized - a necessary step for those included in the computerized Phoenix blacklists in Langley and Kabul, and targeted for destruction.

Meanwhile, at least in the mainstream American news media, the U.S. government's

intentions are always characterized as heroic, generous, even therapeutic. Which is how good can be made to equal bad.

Protecting the People

Dependent on official government sources, the U.S. news media often helps justify the killing of the enemy's civilian supporters by blurring distinctions between combatants and non-combatants.

In Afghanistan - as in Vietnam - special programs offer bounties to help target the enemy's political leaders, like a Taliban "shadow" or "second" governor in a province where Karzai's official or "first" governor is likely despised by the indigenous population because of his corruption.

As Griff Witte wrote in the Washington Post on Dec. 8, 2009, the Taliban has "an elaborate shadow government of governors, police chiefs, district administrators and judges that in many cases already has more bearing on the lives of Afghans than the real government."

Witte quoted Khalid Pashtoon, "a legislator from the southern province of Kandahar who has close ties to Karzai," as saying: "These people in the shadow government are running the country now."

Witte cites the case of "the shadow governor, Maulvi Shaheed Khail," who "is regarded as fearsome but clean. A former minister in the Taliban government, he became the shadow governor here last year after being released from government custody. Residents said he spends most of his time in exile in Pakistan but occasionally crosses the border to discuss strategy with his lieutenants."

In many parts of Afghanistan, Witte continues, "Afghans have decided they prefer the severe but decisive authority of the Taliban to the corruption and inefficiency of Karzai's appointees. From Kunduz province in the north to Kandahar in the south, even government officials concede that their allies have lost the people's confidence and that, increasingly, residents are turning to shadow Taliban officials to solve their problems."

All of these statements are confirmed by my independent source in Afghanistan.

And yet, while Witte reflects the facts of the matter when interviewing an Afghan, he veers into propaganda when quoting official U.S. sources.

Specifically, he claims that all Taliban officials are combatants: "There are no clear lines between the Taliban's fighting force and its shadow administration. Insurgents double as police chiefs; judges may spend an afternoon hearing cases, then take up arms at dusk."

For instance, regarding the role of a province's "second governor," Witte writes that this political leader "sneaks in only at night. He issues edicts on 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' stationery, plots attacks against government forces and fires any lower-ranking Taliban official tainted by even the whiff of corruption."

Through the phrase "plots attacks against government forces," Witte's article contributes to the notion that all political figures in the Taliban are "legitimate" military targets whether they are engaged in combat or not.

Secret Government

The entire intelligence apparatus in Afghanistan is the foundation of the CIA's own secret government. And just as the CIA operates under the cover of U.S. and NATO AID missions, it lurks behind the Karzai government.

Obama now is struggling to present the Karzai government in the best terms possible, though in reality it is no different than the corrupt political apparatus the CIA built in South Vietnam.

In 1965, the CIA named Air Force General Nguyen Cao Ky as chief of national security in South Vietnam. In exchange for a lucrative narcotic smuggling franchise, Ky then sold the CIA the right to create a parallel government of collaborators and miscreants. Called the Revolutionary Development Program, it consisted of numerous CIA covert action programs composed of South Vietnamese officials on the CIA payroll.

The same phenomenon exists in Afghanistan, where the CIA has awarded members of Karzai's inner clique essentially immunity to traffic in narcotics in exchange for their acquiescence to U.S. operations inside Afghanistan, including covert actions, detention centers, informants, hit teams, etc.

The CIA's tolerance of drug dealing by their clients is legendary. In Indochina, one freewheeling CIA agent in Thailand, Puttaporn Khrankhuan, used his protected status to smuggle opium to the United States. After Puttaporn finally was arrested in 1973, William Colby and the CIA prevented the Justice Department from prosecuting him.

Similarly in the 1980s, the CIA ensured that U.S. law enforcement agencies looked the other way regarding cocaine smuggling by the Nicaraguan contra rebels and heroin trafficking by the Afghan mujahedeen fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.

This history is not lost on Karzai and the bandits in his regime. A recent article by the McClatchy Newspapers noted that after U.S. militarists blocked a diplomatic solution in Afghanistan - in favor of Obama's surge - Karzai was spared from having to make meaningful reforms; he even refused to send his drug-dealing brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, into a comfortable exile.

After eight years of U.S. military occupation and misrule by the corrupt Karzai regime, the Afghans cooperating with this operation - the informants, interrogators, hit teams and corrupt pols - understand the wrongheadedness of what they're doing, but their prosperity and lives depend on U.S. patronage.

As a result, the definition of "insurgent" gets skewed to mean anyone who is not allied with the Karzai regime or compliant with the U.S. occupation.

I would like to close this article by quoting from John Cook, a U.S. military officer assigned to the Phoenix Program in Vietnam. CIA officers gave instruction to Phoenix advisers at the Vietnamese Central Intelligence School. Cook said:

"There were forty of us in the class, half American, half Vietnamese. The first day at the school was devoted to lectures by American experts in the insurgency business. Using a smooth, slick delivery, they reviewed all the popular theories concerning communist-oriented revolutions....

"Like so many machines programmed to perform at a higher level than

necessary, they dealt with platitudes and theories far above our dirty little war. They spoke in impersonal tones about what had to be done and how we should do it, as if we were in the business of selling life insurance, with a bonus going to the man who sold the most policies.

“Those districts that were performing well with the quota system were praised; the poor performers were admonished. And it all fitted together nicely with all the charts and figures they offered as support of their ideas.”

Like many of his colleagues, Cook resented “the pretentious men in high position” who gave him unattainable goals, then complained when he did not reach them.

Forty years later, the Obama administration is embarking on the same bloody journey.

As he demonstrated in Oslo, Obama’s job is now to preserve the myth of America as altruistic liberator. But the larger truth is that the “cancer” Obama seeks to destroy in Afghanistan is more a projection of the dark side of the American psyche than a real threat to U.S. national security or to the safety of the American people.

Obama’s counterinsurgency is part of a dirty war for world dominance.

Douglas Valentine is author of *The Phoenix Program*, which is available [through Amazon](#), as well as *The Strength of the Wolf* and the new book *Strength of the Pack*.

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