

Unconventional Warfare in the 21st Century: U.S. Surrogates, Terrorists and Narcotraffickers

By [Tom Burghardt](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Global Research, December 19, 2008

Antifascist Calling... 19 December 2008

author's website: [Antifascist Calling...](#)

On December 13, the whistleblowing website [Wikileaks](#) did investigative- and citizen journalists a great service by [publishing](#) the Army Special Operations Forces FM 3-05.130, titled *Unconventional Warfare*.

Published in September 2008, the 248-page document though unclassified, is restricted "to U.S. Government agencies and their contractors only to protect technical or operational information from automatic dissemination under the International Exchange Program or by other means." The Department of the Army urges recipients to "destroy by any method that will prevent disclosure of contents or reconstruction of the document." *Wikileaks* has guaranteed that the disappearance of this critical primary source into the bowels of the Pentagon will not occur.

Special Warfare's Nazi Provenance

Since the end of World War II, the United States has acted through proxies either to defeat leftist insurgencies or to subvert "hostile" governments, e.g. those states viewed by Washington and the multinational corporations they serve as ideological competitors.

Historically, U.S. unconventional warfare (UW) doctrine was derived from Nazi experiences in countering "partisan warfare" across Europe during World War II. As analyst and scholar Michael McClintock detailed in his essential study on the topic,

American special warfare doctrine would draw considerably on **Wehrmacht** and SS methods of terrorizing civilian populations and, perhaps more importantly, of co-opting local factions to combat partisan resistance. The Department of the Army's **A Study of Special and Subversive Operations** (November 1947) was an early assessment of the lessons learned from World War II in the context of Cold War imperatives. (Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, Counterterrorism, 1940-1990, New York: Pantheon Books, 1992, p. 59)

But the United States did more than translate captured *Wehrmacht* and SS documents: they recruited many Waffen SS veterans, often with an assist from high Vatican officials. Tens of thousands of war criminals were spirited out of Europe along "ratlines" into U.S. hands for clandestine war against the new enemy: the Soviet Union and the international left.

Pathological killers such as SS veteran Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyons, was instrumental when the CIA and the Argentine death-squad generals launched their 1980 “cocaine coup” in Bolivia. Barbie, along with operatives linked to the CIA, Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church and preexisting Nazi networks, “reorganized” Bolivia’s intelligence services to reflect the Southern Cone’s “changing realities.” (For background, see Robert Parry’s excellent [series](#), *Dark Side of Rev. Moon*, The Consortium for Independent Journalism)

Even when the “competition” was peaceful and confined to the political-economic spheres, once the U.S. intervened, violence, civil war and chaos followed. This scenario was played out in Chile during the 1970s, Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique, Nicaragua and El Salvador throughout the 1980s, in Yugoslavia and the Balkans generally during the 1990s, today in Bolivia and Venezuela and on a planetary scale under the rubric of the “global war on terrorism” (GWOT). The lesson for those who buck the global hegemon? U.S. political subversion and state terror will wreck havoc and halt independent development in its tracks.

And when the global Godfather’s military forces directly intervene? Although the U.S. was defeated in Southeast Asia, target countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were destroyed by the United States in the process. Devastated economically and socially, decades later these nations have yet to fully recover from the depredations wrought by their American “liberators.” However, the U.S. military did learn certain unique skills, not least of which was the application of selective violence against the communist National Liberation Front’s civilian infrastructure.

The Phoenix Program, meticulously [analyzed](#) in researcher Douglas Valentine’s definitive account, was launched in 1967 by the CIA and U.S. Special Forces as a means to win “hearts and minds.” But from its inception, Phoenix operators worked in tandem with drug-linked South Vietnamese and Laotian “allies” and morphed into an assassination and torture program that killed thousands. Long after the U.S. withdrew from Southeast Asia, lessons learned through Phoenix and related programs such as Condor and Gladio, were “refined” during the 1970s-1980s in Afghanistan, Italy, Turkey and Central America, and now constitute the bedrock on which the Pentagon’s unconventional warfare doctrine operates today.

Throughout the Cold War, U.S. power in proxy states was exercised through repressive police, intelligence agencies and by far-right civilian allies (referred to as “foreign internal defense,” FID). Such forces, trained and funded by the U.S., combined a neofascist political outlook with organized criminal activities generally, though certainly not limited to, the international narcotics trade.

NATO’s infamous “stay-behind” Operation Gladio networks in Italy and Turkey for example, worked directly with international narcotics syndicates and pro-fascist political parties such as the Italian Avanguardia Nazionale (National Vanguard) founded by the terrorist drug trafficker Stefano delle Chiaie and the Turkish Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (National Action Party, MHP) and the drug-linked terror gang, the Grey Wolves, founded by Alparslan Türkeş, a German sympathizer during World War II.

With links to those nations’ intelligence services, the CIA and the Pentagon, these organizations waged a relentless war against the left through terrorist bombings, murders and assassinations in a bid to destabilize their governments and spark a full-fledged military takeover. Along with the CIA, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) have been instrumental in organizing and waging unconventional warfare with the express

purpose of maintaining the economic-political status quo in target countries.

As long-time readers of *Antifascist Calling* are aware, among the more critical issues explored here are those relating to the intersection of corporate and military power and how those interactions play out on the contemporary political plane to subvert democracy and movements for social justice.

Indeed, reference is frequently made to what I have identified, following Peter Dale Scott and other analysts, as the corporatist *deep state*: that is, the objective interface amongst political elites, multinational corporations, the military, intelligence agencies and organized crime. Unlike Scott however, I contend these linkages *do not* “transcend” the left-right continuum, but rather are part and parcel of Washington’s decades-long war against the left, social justice movements generally and in particular, democratic socialist movements from below.

As we will see in my analysis of FM 3-05.130, USSOCOM make these links explicit, arguing that “UW must be conducted by, with, or through surrogates; and such surrogates must be irregular forces.”

As I averred, proxy forces, often aligned with far-right groups and organized crime-linked assets (for the most part interchangeable players) are the preferred “irregular forces” employed by Washington. USSOCOM states that this definition “is consistent with the historical reasons that the United States has conducted UW” and goes on to cite its “support of both an insurgency, such as the Contras in 1980s Nicaragua, and resistance movements to defeat an occupying power, such as the Mujahideen in 1980s Afghanistan.” It doesn’t get any more explicit than this!

Ideologically Coherent

The authors of FM 3-05.130, far from being militarist troglodytes are knowledgeable and erudite, presenting a broad and ideologically coherent narrative that is both informative and historically intriguing in its transparency and methodological purpose. In other words, unlike their political masters, they don’t pull any punches.

Right up front they inform the reader that UW establishes a “litmus test” which is warfare conducted “by, with or through surrogates” and that their preferred assets are irregular forces:

Irregulars, or irregular forces, are individuals or groups of individuals who are not members of a regular armed force, police, or other internal security force. They are usually nonstate-sponsored and unconstrained by sovereign nation legalities and boundaries. These forces may include, but are not limited to, specific paramilitary forces, contractors, individuals, businesses, foreign political organizations, resistance or insurgent organizations, expatriates, transnational terrorism adversaries, disillusioned transnational terrorism members, black marketers, and other social or political “undesirables.” (Unconventional Warfare, p. 1-3)

While “conventional warfare” is viewed as a conflict between states, Irregular Warfare (IW) and UW according to FM 3-05.130 is “about people not platforms.” Irregular and unconventional warfare “does not depend on military prowess alone.”

It also relies on the understanding of such social dynamics as tribal politics, social networks, religious influences, and cultural mores. Although IW is a violent struggle, not all participating irregulars or irregular forces are necessarily armed. People, more so than weaponry, platforms, and advanced technology, will be the key to success in IW. Successful IW relies on building relationships and partnerships at the local level. It takes patient, persistent, and culturally savvy people within the joint force to execute IW. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 1-5)

Indeed, FM 3-05.130 explicitly states that its “strategic purpose [is] to gain or maintain control or influence over the population and to support that population through political, psychological, and economic methods.” While both IW and UW seek to influence “relevant populations,” UW in contrast to IW, “is always conducted by, with, or through irregular forces.” In other words, local surrogates drawn from relevant far-right and/or organized crime-linked assets are the means of eliciting “influence” over “relevant populations.”

In Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s, “irregular forces” deployed during U.S./NATO destabilization operations in the former Yugoslavia included elements of the Afghan-Arab database of disposable intelligence assets, e.g. al-Qaeda, which have been linked to the CIA, Britain’s MI6, Germany’s Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) and Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI), as well as long-established drug, arms and human trafficking networks aligned with the Albanian and Turkish Mafias. Indeed, “irregular forces” such as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) demonstrated *all* of these relationships in spades.

According to FM 3-05.130, the constituent elements of contemporary IW theory include: Insurgency; COIN (counterinsurgency); UW; Terrorism; CT (counterterrorism); FID (foreign internal defense); Stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations; Strategic communication (SC); PSYOP; Civil-military operations (CMO); Information operations (IO); Intelligence and counterintelligence (CI) activities; Transnational criminal activities, including narco-trafficking, illicit arms dealing, and illegal financial transactions that support or sustain IW; and Law enforcement activities focused on countering irregular adversaries. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 1-5)

Its but a short step as far as it goes, from citing the elements of UW to deploying the most dubious players as strategic assets in planetary-wide U.S. destabilization operations.

The Media’s Role

Explicitly stated is the media’s role in advancing the goals of United States national power. As recent exposés in *The New York Times* and elsewhere have [documented](#), “message force multipliers” such as retired Pentagon officials and former high-ranking officers, often linked to corporate defense firms that rely heavily on Pentagon largesse, have leveraged their expertise and conducted illegal domestic psychological operations (PSYOPS) and information warfare, with the complicity and full knowledge of the giant media firms.

It is important for the official agencies of government, including the armed forces, to recognize the fundamental role of the media as a conduit of information. The USG uses SC to provide top-down guidance for using the informational instrument of national power through coordinated information, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the other instruments of national power. The armed forces support SC themes and messages through IO, public affairs (PA), and defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD). The

armed forces must assure media access consistent with classification requirements, operations security, legal restrictions, and individual privacy. The armed forces must also provide timely and accurate information to the public. Success in military operations depends on acquiring and integrating essential information and denying it to the adversary. The armed forces are responsible for conducting IO, protecting what should not be disclosed, and aggressively attacking adversary information systems. IO may involve complex legal and policy issues that require approval, review, and coordination at the national level. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 2-2)

Indeed, as the authors aver, since UW consists of operations conducted “by, with or through irregular forces,” engagement with the “human terrain” is “fundamentally a conflict of ideas”! In a nutshell, the “human terrain” explicitly includes the American public who are also the targets of Pentagon propagandistic “information operations.” This is stated explicitly:

By contrast, USG-controlled specific instruments of informational power, while narrower in scope, can achieve specific and measurable results useful to prosecuting UW. ARSOF [Army Special Operations Forces] can work with DOS [Department of State] counterparts to identify and engage select TAs [target audiences] that are able to influence behavior within a UWOA [unconventional warfare operating area]. Such TAs may be inside the UWOA itself or outside but able to influence the UWOA. The USG can then subject these TAs, directly or indirectly, to a DOS public diplomacy (PD) campaign coordinated to support the UW effort. Similarly, since UW may be a long-duration or politically sensitive effort, ARSOF and its DOS partner, the Bureau of Public Affairs, can craft a PA campaign intended to keep the U.S. domestic audience informed of the truth in a manner supportive of USG goals and the effective prosecution of UW. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 2-3)

Economic Subversion

For the authors of FM 3-05.130, “properly integrated manipulation of economic power can and should be a component of UW.” Never mind that such “manipulation” can and did result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of human beings in Iraq prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation as well as in a score of other nations that have defied the U.S.

The cases of Chile and Nicaragua are instructive in this regard, where the disgraced president, Richard Nixon, vowed to “make the economy scream,” prior to the 1973 coup, or the crippling sanctions and economic embargo imposed on Nicaragua’s Sandinista government. Various sanctions regimes unambiguously “can build and sustain international coalitions waging or supporting U.S. UW campaigns.” A similar methodology is being applied today against Iran as “punishment” for its legal development of civilian nuclear power.

Like all other instruments of U.S. national power, the use and effects of economic “weapons” are interrelated and they must be coordinated carefully. Once again, ARSOF must work carefully with the DOS and intelligence community (IC) to determine which elements of the human terrain in the UWOA are most susceptible to economic engagement and what second- and third-order effects are likely from such engagement. The United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) placement abroad and its mission to engage human groups provide one channel for leveraging economic incentives. The DOC’s can similarly leverage its routine influence with U.S.

corporations active abroad. Moreover, the IO effects of economic promises kept (or ignored) can prove critical to the legitimacy of U.S. UW efforts. UW practitioners must plan for these effects. (*Unconventional Warfare*, p. 2-7)

Indeed, ARSOF plans for waging UW take an integrated approach and assert that they “can and should exploit the active and analytical capabilities existing in the financial instruments of U.S. power.” The application of financial warfare however, including the “persuasive influence” of state and nonstate “actors” regarding the availability and terms “of loans, grants, or other financial assistance” is predicated on towing the U.S. line. The authors aver that “such application of financial power must be part of a circumspect, integrated, and consistent UW plan.” In other words, threats, bribery and economic subversion generally can work wonders in getting the attention of recalcitrant states not “on board” with the U.S.

Narcotrafficking Networks and the “Global War on Terror”

For decades, investigative journalists, researchers and analysts have noted the symbiotic relationship amongst international narcotrafficking syndicates, neofascist political groups, U.S. intelligence agencies and U.S. Special Forces in the war against leftist adversaries.

Dozens of books and hundreds of articles by journalists and writers such as Alfred W. McCoy, Peter Dale Scott, Henrik Krüger, Robert Parry, Gary Webb, Jonathan Marshall, Douglas Valentine, Daniel Hopsicker, Bill Conroy as well as exposés by former DEA investigators such as Michael Levine and Celerino Castillo III, have documented the long and bloody history of U.S. complicity in the global drugs trade.

While the United States has pumped billions of dollars into so-called drug eradication programs in target countries such as Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Afghanistan and Mexico through ill-conceived projects such as Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative, also known as Plan Mexico, recent reports, most notably by [*The Narco News Bulletin*](#), have documented the close interrelationships amongst narcotraffickers, rightist extremists, political elites and U.S. intelligence agencies.

Indeed, investigative journalist Bill Conroy recently [*documented*](#) how a U.S. trained and equipped special operations group within the Mexican army (the Zetas) “is now assisting the Mexican military in its narco-trafficking operations along the border.”

None of this however, phases the authors of *Unconventional Warfare*. And why should it. As they themselves describe the doctrine, unconventional warfare is “conducted by, with, or through surrogates; and such surrogates must be irregular forces,” the next logical step in the equation is the utilization of transnational criminal networks to advance U.S. national power. The section, “Law Enforcement Instrument of United States National Power and Unconventional Warfare,” states this explicitly: no tinfoil hat needed here!

Actors engaged in supporting elements in the UWOA may rely on criminal activities, such as smuggling, narcotics, or human trafficking. Political and military adversaries in the UWOA will exhibit the same sensitivity to official exposure and engagement because criminal entities routinely seek to avoid law enforcement. Sometimes, political and military adversaries are simultaneously criminal adversaries, which ARSOF UW planners must consider a threat. At other times, the methods and networks of real or perceived criminal entities can be useful as supporting elements of a U.S.-sponsored UW effort. In either case, ARSOF understand the importance of coordinating

military intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) for specific UW campaigns with the routine intelligence activities conducted by U.S. law enforcement agencies. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 2-7)

During subversive operations by U.S. ARSOF soldiers in target areas, indigenous networks, many of whom are linked to far-right and narcotrafficking groups (Nicaragua, Bosnia, Kosovo), including “former” allies such as al-Qaeda, are referred to as “The Underground” and “The Auxiliary” in FM 3-05.130. Details however, are few and far between and the authors state unambiguously:

There is more SF participation in developing and advising underground [and auxiliary] elements than is widely understood or acknowledged. Most such participation is classified and inappropriate for inclusion in this manual. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 5-5)

Preparing the ground for U.S. attacks and/or subversive operations by proxy forces aligned with American goals are a key component of UW theory. Whether a population is “on-board” with U.S. geostrategic goals or the tactical modalities employed in such campaigns is irrelevant to the new cold warriors of the GWOT. When “persuasion” fails the muscle moves in to get the attention on the “natives.”

Organization of the larger indigenous population from which the irregular forces are drawn—the mass base—must likewise be conducted primarily by the irregular organization itself under indirect guidance of SF. The primary value of the mass base to UW operations is less a matter of formal organization than of marshaling population groups to act in specific ways that support the overall UW campaign. The mass base, or general population and society at large, is recognized as an operational rather than a structural effort for ARSOF in UW. Elements of the mass base are divided into three distinct groups in relation to the cause or movement—pro, anti/con, and those who are uncommitted, undecided, or ambivalent. ARSOF, the underground, and the auxiliary then conduct irregular activities to influence or leverage these groups. These groups may be witting or unwitting of the UW nature of the operations or activities in which they are utilized. (Unconventional Warfare, p. 5-5)

In Colombia for example, U.S. “counterdrug” assistance to the corrupt Uribe government flowed directly to the narcotrafficking far-right death squad, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, or AUC. Though designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department, the Uribe government’s military high command, directly advised by the Pentagon, funneled weapons and intelligence that was used by the narcofascists to murder union organizers, often after payment by U.S. multinational corporations such as Chiquita Brands International, of anyone the group identified as a “guerrilla.”

In ARSOF parlance, AUC “influence”—dragging unsuspecting citizens off a bus and beheading them in front of their children, for example—is what is meant when corporate- or drug-linked death squads “conduct irregular activities” to “leverage these groups.” But the international community has another term to describe these activities: *state terrorism*.

In 2004, as part of broad U.S. efforts to unseat Venezuela’s socialist President Hugo Chávez, Venezuelan authorities arrested some 100 AUC fighters who were planning to attack specially-selected targets in Caracas. According to published reports, several high-ranking

American and Colombian military officers were implicated in the operation.

The parapolitical scandal which continues to rock Bogotá, revealed high-level involvement by Colombia's political and military elite with the narcofascist AUC. But the scandal also revealed the involvement of the U.S. 7th Special Forces Group and the 1st Psychological Operations Battalion in directly training and advising Colombian military units responsible for the worst human rights abuses.

Numerous reports have emerged that detail these linkages, including the 2007 [disclosure](#) by the National Security Archive that Colombian Army commander General Mario Montoya "engaged in a joint operation with a Medellín-based paramilitary group. 'Operation Orion' was part of a larger military offensive in the city during 2002-03 to attack urban guerrilla networks. The sweep resulted in at least 14 deaths and dozens of disappearances. The classified intelligence report confirmed 'information provided by a proven source,' according to comments from the U.S. defense attaché included in the document."

This is but the tip of the proverbial iceberg, however.

In Afghanistan, the world's number one producer and processor of opium and its finished "product" heroin, bound for European and U.S. markets, drug trafficking according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) in their [2008 World Drug Report](#), is "out of control." According to UNDOC, drug money is used as "a lubricant for corruption, and a source of terrorist financing: in turn, corrupt officials and terrorists make drug production and trafficking easier."

Indeed, since the 2001 U.S. invasion and occupation, opium production has skyrocketed some 1,000% and accounts for a large percentage of the country's gross domestic product. Tellingly, some of the staunchest U.S. allies in the area are directly tied to international narcotics organizations. According to UNDOC, the global increase in opium production "was almost entirely due to the 17% expansion of cultivation in Afghanistan, which is now 193,000 ha [hectares]" reaching 8,700 metric tons in 2007, accounting for a staggering 92% of global opium production!

Despite these horrendous statistics, the authors of FM 3-05.130 can assert that "the methods and networks of real or perceived criminal entities can be useful"! Indeed they can, as a seemingly limitless source of black funds earmarked for U.S. planetary subversion in the interest of expanding American corporate power.

According to a June 2008 report by [The Times](#), after last year's bumper crop sent the price of opium spiraling downwards, the Taliban and U.S.-connected drug lords linked to Hamid Karzai's government, are stockpiling vast quantities of opium in order to induce a rise in world prices. And *Time Magazine* [reported](#) in October that the value of hoarded opium may be as much as \$3.2 billion.

Celebrated by the Pentagon and the U.S. media as a "splendid victory," the 2001 invasion and occupation of Afghanistan quickly spiraled out of control and the country now faces a resurgent Taliban, a new base of operations for al-Qaeda in the tribal areas of Pakistan and evidence of Pakistani ISI involvement in aiding the fundamentalist insurgents and the global drugs trade. But for American unconventional warriors, a full accounting of war crimes that ARSOF supervised and their Northern Alliance "allies" carried out have yet to be answered.

As Peter Dale Scott [noted](#) in 2002,

It's a bitter irony: The largely successful U.S. campaign against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan is resulting in an increase of funds for terrorists around the globe.

It is true, as President Bush has insisted, that global terrorism is financed by the flow of illicit drugs. Yet by installing and rewarding a coalition of drug-financed warlords in Kabul, the United States has itself helped restore the flow of Afghan heroin to terrorist groups, from the Balkans and Chechnya to Tajikistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. ("Poppy Paradox: U.S. War in Afghanistan Boosts Terror Funds," Dissident Voice, August 3, 2002)

Indeed, among the staunchest U.S. allies in the region, characters such as Hazrat Ali and Gul Agha, "have been 'bought off' with millions in deals brokered by U.S. and British intelligence." But while America was happy to endorse a drug-linked status quo that relied on its so-called "warlord strategy" to "stabilize" Afghanistan, part of the blowback from these dubious alliances included allowing bin Laden to escape into Pakistan in 2001 after the "battle" of Tora Bora.

But for Pentagon proponents of unconventional warfare, the "price is always right" when it comes to strategic and tactical alliances with narcotraffickers and international terrorists. After all, since "UW must be conducted by, with, or through surrogates; and such surrogates must be irregular forces," everything is permitted.

Tom Burghardt is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to publishing in *Covert Action Quarterly* and [Global Research](#), an independent research and media group of writers, scholars, journalists and activists based in Montreal, his articles can be read on [Dissident Voice](#), [The Intelligence Daily](#), [Pacific Free Press](#) and the whistleblowing website [Wikileaks](#). He is the editor of *Police State America: U.S. Military "Civil Disturbance" Planning*, distributed by [AK Press](#).

The original source of this article is Antifascist Calling...
Copyright © [Tom Burghardt](#), Antifascist Calling..., 2008

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **Tom Burghardt**
<http://antifascist-calling.blogspot.com/>

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in

print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca