

By Douglas Valentine

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On Dec. 31, I listened in dismay as an NPR “terrorism” expert condemned the suicide bombing that killed seven CIA employees in Afghanistan as especially hideous because the CIA victims were spreading economic development and democracy in the area as members of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Less surprising but no less disingenuous were the comments of CIA Director Leon Penetta who said the dead CIA officers were “doing the hard work that must be done to protect our country from terrorism.” And President Barack Obama’s depiction of the CIA officers as “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 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 “militants,” “terrorists” or “jihadists” -- or as collateral damage, people killed by accident.

There is never any distinction made between Afghan nationalists fighting the U.S.-led occupation of their country and real terrorists who have inflicted intentional violence against civilians to achieve a political objective (the classic definition of terrorism).

Indeed, despite the U.S. news media’s frequent description of the Dec. 30 attack on the CIA officers as “terrorism,” 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.

Many U.S. press accounts also have suggested that the suicide attack was in retaliation for drone strikes on Taliban forces. But there is now some speculation that the suicide bomb attack on the CIA personnel may have been payback for the Dec. 27 killing of 10 people in Ghazi Khan village in Narang district of the eastern Afghan province of Kunar.

The 10 Afghanis were shot to death during a raid by American commandos, apparently a Special Forces unit.

The commandos, often Green Berets or Navy SEALs detailed to the CIA's Special Activities Division, operate outside traditional legal restrictions on warfare. During the post-9/11 "global war on terror," these teams have engaged in kidnappings, killings and executions of suspected "terrorists," "insurgents" and "militants."

NATO spokesmen initially labeled the 10 victims in Ghazi Khan as "insurgents" or at least relatives of an individual suspected of belonging to a "terrorist" cell that manufactured improvised explosive devices used to kill U.S. and NATO 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.

Allegations of Handcuffed Victims

According to [a Dec. 31 article](#) published by the Times of London, the American-led raid faces accusations "of dragging innocent children from their beds and shooting them. ... Locals said that some victims were handcuffed before being killed."

An official statement posted on Afghan President Hamid Karzai's Web site said government investigators who were dispatched to the scene concluded that the raiding party "took ten people from three homes, eight of them school students in grades six, nine and ten, one of them a guest, the rest from the same family, and shot them dead."

Assadullah Wafa, who led the investigation, told The (UK) Times that the U.S. unit flew by helicopter from Kabul, landing about two kilometers from the village.

“The troops walked from the helicopters to the houses and, according to my investigation, they gathered all the students from two rooms, into one room, and opened fire,” said Wafa, a former governor of Helmand province. “It’s impossible they [the victims] were al-Qaeda. They were children, they were civilians, they were innocent.”

The Times also quoted the school’s headmaster as saying the victims were asleep in three rooms when the raiding party arrived. “Seven students were in one room,” said Rahman Jan Ehsas. “A student and one guest were in another room, a guest room, and a farmer was asleep with his wife in a third building.

“First the foreign troops entered the guest room and shot two of them. Then they entered another room and handcuffed the seven students. Then they killed them. Abdul Khaliq [the farmer] heard shooting and came outside. When they saw him, they shot him as well. He was outside. That’s why his wife wasn’t killed.”

The guest was a shepherd boy, 12, called Samar Gul, the headmaster said, adding that six of the students were in high school and two were in primary school. He said that all the students were his nephews.

A local elder, Jan Mohammed, said that three boys were killed in one room and five were handcuffed before they were shot. “I saw their school books covered in blood,” he said, according to The Times.

The Afghan National Security Directorate, which usually is a compliant outlet for CIA communiqués, said “international forces from an unknown address came to the area and without facing any armed resistance, put ten youth in two rooms and killed them.”

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. He asserted that the assault force had come under fire from several buildings in the village.

Yet, the record of American forces engaging in indiscriminate and intentional killings of unarmed people in Afghanistan and Iraq is now a long one, with testimony about premeditated executions even emerging in U.S. military disciplinary hearings. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “[Bush’s Global Dirty War](#).”]

The United Nations also has warned against nighttime raids of private homes because the attacks often cause civilian deaths. In the case of Ghazi Khan, however, the Afghan government account indicates that most of the killings were cold-blooded murder, not nighttime accidents.

It appears, too, that these types of brutal operations may be increasing in frequency with Obama’s plan to “surge” 30,000 additional U.S. troops into Afghanistan, bringing the total to about 100,000. Yet, this ratcheting up of the cycle of violence only seems likely to incite more and more revenge killings.

Already, Afghans have vowed to avenge the killings of the school children by the U.S. commandos, and the CIA is now vowing to avenge the killing of its officers, who included the base chief, a mother of three young children.

In the meantime, the surviving CIA personnel at Forward Operating Base Chapman barricaded themselves inside as they questioned all Afghan employees who were on duty at the time of the Dec. 30 bomb attack. Afghans who worked with the CIA on the outside were locked out.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

The recent events are instructive in explaining how CIA covert operations, including their own psywar and terror operations, are conducted and whitewashed by the mainstream American news media.

Few Americans were aware that FOB Chapman (named for Nathan Chapman, a Green Beret member of a CIA unit who was the first American killed in Afghanistan eight years ago) was a CIA base camp. However, the Americans were the only ones in the dark.

The local Afghanis knew full well that Chapman was a CIA base and that “reconstruction” was a cover for coordinating sophisticated drone attacks. But as it was a forward base, Chapman surely also focused on paramilitary operations like the one at Ghazi Khan, using the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) as cover.

The PRTs have been one of the primary means of gathering intelligence from informants, secret agents and field interrogations. The PRTs are a foundation stone of the CIA’s secret government in Afghanistan and have been a unilateral CIA operation since 2002 when they were started under the imprimatur of U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

However, complicating the CIA’s mission is the fact that the Afghan resistance has successfully infiltrated the entities that the CIA has created.

Given their elevated status and class prerogatives, CIA officers do not perform menial tasks, enabling Afghan “double-agents” to infiltrate the bases as chauffeurs, cleaning staff and security guards as well as by pretending to be informants.

In the case of the Dec. 30 suicide bombing, the informant has been identified as Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, a Jordanian national who had been captured – and supposedly turned – by Jordanian intelligence and the CIA. He reportedly lured the CIA officers and a Jordanian intelligence colleague to the meeting at FOB Chapman with promises of important target information relating to al-Qaeda's second-in-command Ayman Zawahiri before detonating the

bomb.

The case of the Jordanian double agent also raises questions about the quality of the intelligence that the CIA collects to mount drone and paramilitary attacks. If supposed informants include people willing to die while killing CIA personnel, it is a reasonable assumption that informants might be passing along bogus tips to discredit the CIA.

Over the past seven years, the PRTs have provided CIA “agents” - usually Afghans working in the PRTs - with a covert way to gather intelligence from their sub-agents in the field, people in villages like Ghazi Khan who spy on other people in the villages.

Sometimes the CIA members of the PRTs can handle this “sub-agent” contact function if they speak the language, but they most often rely on interpreters. They also rely on Afghans to determine if the intelligence given about “suspects” in a particular village is reliable. If a “sub-agent” or “agent” is a double, the PRTs killing teams can easily be misdirected.

The main focus of the intelligence gathering is to identify members of the Taliban “infrastructure.” The sub-agent tells the 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. The sub-agent also provides a picture, so the PRT attackers supposedly know who they're snatching or snuffing out.

Other times, the CIA will attempt to blackmail or intimidate a person into becoming an agent. The Taliban are well aware of these tactics and try to infiltrate the PRTs to provide bogus information.

CIA officers killed at FOB Chapman were involved with the local PRT, ostensibly, according to NPR, to spread economic development and democracy. But 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.

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. That means “death squad” operations can be expected to expand in the coming months.

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 developed the programs that would eventually, in 1965, be grouped within its Revolutionary Development Teams, as part of the Revolutionary Development 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 and an Australian military officer, Ian Tiege, on contract to the CIA.

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.”

Scotton named his special PAT unit the *Trung-doi biet kich Nham dou* (people's commando teams).

“Two functions split out of this,” Scotton said. 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 lot of negative publicity in 1965 when Ohio Sen. Stephen Young charged that they disguised themselves as Vietcong and discredited the Communists by committing atrocities.

"It was alleged to me that several of them executed two village leaders and raped some women," the *Herald Tribune* reported Young as saying.

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

Staffing unilateral CIA programs is a crucial element of this 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 organizational and motivational techniques, but he also relied on Communist defectors as his cadre.

"We felt ex-Vietminh had unique communication skills. 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."

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 agents contacted sub-agents in the village – by ostensibly setting up a secret means (usually a portable shack) for civilians to complain about the government. The PRTs have this Census Grievance element under the 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."

By mid-1965 the CIA was using Be's 59-man model as its standard team, at which point the Rural Construction Cadre program was renamed the Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) program.

PRTs in Iraq

The CIA's RDC program in Vietnam has now 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 50-100 civilian and military specialists.

A typical Provincial Reconstruction Team 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 "counter-terror," as well as 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 that they got about Iraq, and are now quite happy to believe they have helped put Iraq back on its feet. They also are quite happy to forget the devastation they wrought.

But few Iraqis are fooled by the "war as economic development" shell game, or by the standards the U.S. 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." [See Dahr Jamail's [*Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*](#).]

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 (SIGR), describes the 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 Afghanistan, the PRTs in Iraq were mostly a gimmick to make Americans feel good about the occupations. 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.

For powerful forces in the United States, the wars have meant business profits and political gain. As ex-Vice President Dick Cheney continues to show, calling a political adversary soft on terror remains a fearsome club to wield.

And for the average American, the drone killings and other violence against “Islamists” quiet the carefully nurtured fears and sate the hunger for revenge. Many are happy as long as the outcome can be packaged as a “win” for the USA.

Pushed out of the U.S. headlines and deep into the national subconscious are the horrendous sins that have been inflicted on the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq.

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