

Afghanistan's Operation Phoenix

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On June 15, AP reported that "Gen. Stanley McChrystal, a four-star American general with a long history in special operations, took charge of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan (today), a change in command the Pentagon hopes will turn the tide in an increasingly violent eight-year war."

McChrystal is a hired gun, an assassin, a man known for committing war crime atrocities as head of the Pentagon's infamous Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) - established in 1980 and comprised of the Army's Delta Force and Navy Seals, de facto death squads writer Seymour Hersh described post-9/11 as an "executive assassination wing" operating out of Dick Cheney's office.

A 2006 Newsweek profile called JSOC "part of what Vice President Dick Cheney was referring to when he said America would have to 'work on the dark side' after 9/11." It called McChrystal then "an affable but tough Army Ranger" with no elaboration of his "dark side" mission.

In his May 17 article titled "Obama's Animal Farm: Bigger, Bloodier Wars Equal Peace and Justice," James Petras called him a "notorious psychopath" in describing him this way:

His rise through the ranks was "marked by his central role in directing special operations teams engaged in extrajudicial assassinations, systematic torture, bombing of civilian communities and search and destroy missions. He is the very embodiment of the brutality and gore that accompanies military-driven empire building."

His resume shows contempt for human life and the rule of law - a depravity Conrad described in his classic work, "Heart of Darkness:" the notion of "exterminat(ing) all the brutes" to civilize them, and removing lesser people to colonize and dominate them by devising battle plans amounting to genocide.

In June 2001, McChrystal became Chief of Staff, XVIII Airborne Corp. After the Afghanistan invasion, he was appointed Chief of Staff, Combined Joint Task Force 180, Operation Enduring Freedom. In September 2003, he was Commanding General, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). In February 2006, he became Commander, Joint Special Operations - Command/Commander, Joint Special Operations Command Forward, United States Special Operations, then in August 2008 General Director, the Joint Staff until his current appointment as US/NATO Afghanistan commander.

Detailed information of his role in these capacities is classified and unacknowledged, but Human Rights Watch (HRW) revealed some of what he directed in its July 22, 2006 report titled "No Blood, No Foul" - meaning short of drawing blood, all abuses were acceptable and

wouldn't result in investigations or prosecution.

HRW reported soldiers' firsthand accounts of detainee abuse by Task Force 20/121/6-26/145 at Baghdad's Camp Nama (an acronym for Nasty-Ass Military Area) and elsewhere in Iraq.

JSOC's assignment was (and still is) to capture or kill "high-value" combatants, including Saddam Hussein, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, and many hundreds of Iraqis targeted in sweeping capture and extermination missions that include lots of collateral killings and destruction.

Through most of 2003 and 2004, detainees were held at interrogation facilities like Camp Nama at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). With good reason, it was off-limits to the ICRC and most US military personnel. In summer 2004, it was moved to a new location near Balad and also had facilities in Fallujah, Ramadi and Kirkuk.

US personnel and former detainees reported torture and abuse as common practice, including beatings, confinement in shipping containers for 24 hours in extreme heat, exposure to extreme cold, death threats, humiliation, psychological stress, and much more.

Sergeant Jeff Perry (a pseudonym he requested to avoid recrimination) was a Camp Nama special interrogator during the first half of 2004. He said task force members were military special forces and CIA personnel, none of whom revealed ranks or last names to maintain secrecy.

Five interrogation rooms were used, the harshest called the "black room" where everything was black with speakers in the corners and on the ceiling. A table and chairs were in one corner for a boom box and computer.

Detainees were stripped naked and subjected to stress standing, sleep deprivation, loud noise, strobe lights, beatings, dousing with cold water, and other abuses.

Harshness levels were less severe in other rooms, the "soft room" being least extreme and used for cooperating detainees. However, throughout interrogations, they were shifted from one room to another, but those put in the "black room" were considered the most high-value.

Treatment authorization in writing or by computer came from the camp's command structure - signed by "whoever was in charge at the time" reporting to McChrystal or one of his subordinates.

Sergeant Perry saw him visit Camp Nama several times, and said its commanding officer told interrogators that the White House or Donald Rumsfeld were briefed on the information they obtained. He also learned that the facility was "completely closed off" and secret, and that ICRC, other investigators, and the Army's Criminal Investigation Command (CID) were forbidden access to it.

In March 2006, The New York Times published a feature article based on interviews with over a dozen US personnel who served at Camp Nama or were familiar with its operations. Their accounts corroborated Perry's and included details of other abuses. Much of the same information came out about torture at Guantanamo and other overseas US prisons, including Camp Cropper, Iraq (near Baghdad Airport) now expanded to hold up to 2000 detainees.

HRW reviewed hundreds of “credible allegations of serious mistreatment and torture (as) standard operation procedure” at locations throughout Iraq involving special forces, CIA, and others. Its report is based on firsthand accounts from three locations between 2003 – 2005 when McChrystal was in charge of Special Ops.

On March 31, 2009 on Democracy Now, Seymour Hersh said US forces conducted assassinations in a dozen or more countries, including in Latin and Central America. “And it’s been going on and on and on,” he said. George Bush “authorized these kinds of actions in the Middle East” and elsewhere....” Now Obama’s doing the same thing.

“And the idea that the American president would think he has the constitutional power or the legal right to tell soldiers....to go out and find people based on lists and execute them is just amazing to me....”

During his tenure, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld gave the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) authority to carry out killings anywhere on the globe. Hersh said “it operates out of Florida, and it involves a lot of wings.” One is “the Joint Special Op – JSOC. It’s a special (Navy Seals and Delta Force) unit....black units, the commando units....And they promote from within. It’s a unit that has its own promotion structure. And one of the elements....about getting ahead....is the number of kills you have,” especially high-value targets. Cheney was deeply involved. Robert Gates likely is now.

Targeting goes on in a lot of countries besides Iraq and Afghanistan, including Colombia, Eritrea, Madagascar, Kenya, or anywhere to “kill people who are believed....to be Al Qaeda....Al Qaeda-linked or anti-American” – fictitious outside enemies without which Obama’s wars can’t continue nor could they under George Bush..

In his book “America’s War on Terrorism,” Michel Chossudovsky uncovered evidence that Al Qaeda was a CIA creation from the Soviet-Afghan 1980s war, and in the 1990s Washington “consciously supported Osama bin Laden, while at the same time placing him on the FBI’s ‘most wanted list’ as the World’s foremost terrorist.”

He remains so today, even though David Ray Griffin’s new book (“Osama Bin Laden: Dead or Alive?”) provides convincing evidence that he died in late 2001, a conclusion many US counterterrorism experts support and believe his conveniently timed video messages are fakes.

Capturing or Killing Bin Laden

In a January 2009 CBS television interview, Obama suggested that he’s dead by saying “whether he is technically alive or not, he is so pinned down that he cannot function. My preference (is) to capture or kill him. But if we have so tightened the noose that he’s in a cave somewhere and can’t even communicate with his operatives, then we will meet our goal of protecting America.”

Nonetheless, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs responded to the latest purported bin Laden statement that it’s “consistent with messages we’ve seen in the past from al Qaeda threatening the US and other countries that are involved in counterterrorism efforts.”

So it’s no surprise that top administration orders reach field commanders like McChrystal to capture or kill the usual suspects. From known reports about him, he carries them out with relish.

The Obama administration gave him carte blanche authority to choose his staff for their assigned mission – expand the Af-Pak war with more troops, funding, stepped up counterinsurgency, targeted killings, and secret drone and other attacks against any targets he chooses in either country. He'll also have more political control, possibly with a Washington-appointed civilian authority to run the Afghanistan government day to day, making Hamid Karzai more of a figurehead than currently.

Obama's war aims to pacify the country and Afghan/Pakistan border areas through scorched earth terror, targeted assassinations, and as much mass killing as it takes to prevail. McChrystal has the job, a man one observer said "comes from a world where killing by any means is the norm and a blanket of government secrecy provides the necessary protection." All the greater with Obama's endorsement.

Former 82nd Airborne Division commander General David Rodriguez, Defense Secretary Gates' top military aide, will be his deputy. Gates praised McChrystal for his "unique skill set in counterinsurgency" and said the mission of both men and their team "requires new thinking and new approaches by our military leaders." Clearly implied are the Special Ops skills they possess in what an unnamed Defense Department official called "unconventional warfare....to track and kill insurgents."

These tactics kill many hundreds, displace hundreds of thousands, and enrage civilians on both sides of the Af-Pak border. Yet pursuing them is Obama's top war strategy priority that may include Iraq as violence there heats up.

Operation Phoenix

From 1968 – 1973, the CIA ran or was involved in the Phoenix Program with US Special Forces and its own Military Assistance Command Vietnam-Special Operations Group (MACV-SOG) involving covert missions to crush the National Liberation Front (NLF resistance called the Viet Cong or VC). One person involved called the operation a "depersonalized murder program" to remove opposition and terrorize the population into submission.

In 1975, Counterspy magazine said it was "the most indiscriminate and massive program of political murder since the Nazi death camps of world war two." It even targeted certain US military personnel considered security risks and members of the South Vietnamese government.

In simple terms, the program conducted mass killings and seizures of suspected NLF members and collaborators with special emphasis on high-value targets – by some estimates around 80,000 or more before it ended.

Wayne Cooper was a Foreign Service officer at the time. He spent 18 months in Vietnam, most of it as a Phoenix advisor at Cantho in the Mekong Delta. He called the operation a "disreputable, CIA-inspired effort, often deplored as a bloody-handed assassination program (and) a failure."

In the mid-1960s, it began as a CIA "Counter Terror (CT) program "never recognized by the South Vietnamese government." It "recruited, organized, supplied and directly paid CT teams whose function was to use Vietcong techniques, kidnappings and intimidation – against the Vietcong leadership."

By 1968, the program was expanded and called Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation

(ICEX), then Phoenix. From General William Westmoreland and “Ambassador-for-pacification Robert Komer” on down, “neutralizing” the VC was top priority.

Westmoreland took charge. A Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) organization was established, under which Phoenix was run. Cooper cited numerous problems for its failure and criticized experts sifting through them to get it right next time. He called the program a “gimmick” unable to “compensate for South Vietnam’s” popular opposition to the war and concluded that no counterinsurgency can succeed under those circumstances.

Certainly not in Afghanistan and Iraq, two countries historically opposed to foreign occupations with a record of brave resistance to end them. They represent what the CIA called Vietnam during that earlier era – “the grand illusion of the American cause;” the latest Washington misadventures no matter how long they go on, whatever amounts are spent on them, or how much mass killing and destruction persist under any command. America hasn’t won a war (or fought a legal one) since WW II, something Obama might consider as he plans his next move.

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