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The Obama/Pentagon War Narrative, the Real War and Where Afghan Civilian Deaths Do Matter

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Abstract

This essay explores upon two inter-related issues: (1) the course of America’s raging Afghan war as actually experienced on the ground as contrasted with the Pentagon and mainstream media narrative and (2) the unrelenting Obama/Pentagon efforts to control the public narrative of that war.¹

As the real war on the ground spread geographically and violence intensified, U.S. efforts to construct a positive spin re-doubled. An examination of bodies – of foreign occupation forces and innocent Afghan civilians – reveals a clear trade-off. NATO country elites understand the quagmire and have begun pulling-back.

Keywords: body trade-offs; civilian deaths caused by the US/NATO (2001-2010); critical analysis of Afghan civilian body counts; Pentagon means to control war narrative; phases of America’s war in Afghanistan.

Resumen

Este artículo investiga dos cuestiones relacionadas: (1) la experiencia sobre el terreno de la feroz guerra de EE.UU. en Afganistán, en contraste con el relato del Pentágono y los medios de comunicación dominantes; (2) los implacables esfuerzos de Obama y el Pentágono para controlar el relato público sobre esta guerra. Mientras la guerra real se extendía geográficamente y la violencia se intensificaba, se redoblaban también los esfuerzos de los EE.UU. para construir una lectura positiva. El examen de los cadáveres (de las fuerzas extranjeras de ocupación y de los civiles afganos inocentes) revela una situación de intercambio. Las élites de los países de los países de la OTAN han comprendido que se han metido en un callejón sin salida y comienzan a dar marcha atrás.

Palabras clave: intercambio de cadáveres; muertes civiles producidas por los EEUU y la OTAN (2001-2010); análisis crítico de las cuentas sobre muertes civiles afganos; medios del Pentágono para controlar el relato bélico; fases de la guerra de los EEUU en Afganistán.

Herold, M. The Obama/Pentagon War Narrative, the Real War and Where Afghan Civilian Deaths Do Matter

Introduction.

I believe that the end of the Afghan war will be “determined more by bodies than by politics or deals”. The period 2002-6 was an incubating period for the resurgence of the Taliban and its allies. U.S. raids on the ground transformed what had been a fragmented Afghan resistance into a war of national liberation, a matter I have addressed elsewhere in a widely reproduced essay. The rest is history: a trend of soaring Afghan civilian deaths, escalating violence, local military and US/NATO occupation forces deaths and spreading insecurity. The following systems’ chart highlights the essential feedback elements at work in the America’s Afghan war:

![Figure 1. Deadly Trade-offs in Afghanistan](image)

The essential link is that America’s Afghan war causes civilian casualties which, in turn, fuel the Afghan resistance which, in turn, causes more U.S casualties. No link exists between Afghan and U.S civil societies, i.e. rising civilian casualties in America’s foreign wars have never caused the U.S general public to become anti-war. McChrystal’s alleged effort to reduce Afghan civilian casualties (-) was a trade-off for rising U.S military casualties (++) as I demonstrated a year ago. Figure 1 makes an essential point: the United States can pursue its war but the result will be either soaring Afghan civilian casualties or escalating U.S. military deaths. Whereas Gen. Stanley McChrystal opted for the latter, his successor clearly has chosen the former. McChrystal had pronounced the much ballyhooed new metric of civilian casualties. Ackerman writes, “Since Gen. David Petraeus took command of the war effort in late June 2010, coalition aircraft have flown 2,600 attack sorties. That’s 50% more than they did during the same period in 2009. Not surprisingly, civilian casualties are on the rise, as well.” Thus, air strikes
are “in” again and the U.S. military is even brazenly bragging about them⁸. But such news is found primarily in the Blogosphere at Wired.com and not to be seen in the New York Times, Washington Post or on PBS/NPR.

Everything indicates more of the same as during 2006-9. As Nir Rosen points out, Obama has set an arbitrary deadline of 2014, but his generals are doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results. There is no evidence of progress on any front and every reason to believe next year in Afghanistan will be worse than this year. We mistakenly see Afghanistan through the prism of Iraq. But the ‘surge’ did not reduce violence in Iraq. It was Iraqi social and political dynamics. And none of these elements have their Afghan equivalents. And Iraq remains more violent than Afghanistan. We spend so much time thinking about what we can do in Afghanistan that we ignore the question of whether we even should do it⁹.

I shall address neither the fallacies put out by Bush/Obama to justify the Afghan war⁰ nor a host of issues analyzed by others which I take as givens providing the context for the raging warⁱ. These include:

- warlords continue to dominate across most of Afghanistan as confirmed in recent elections;
- Afghanistan is either the most or second-most corrupt nation in the world. Karzai’s brother in Kandahar is both a major drug dealer and on the CIA payroll to provide security. Released WikiLeaks documents reveal rampant bribery, graft, etc.;
- Numerous national-level Afghan politician are on the CIA payroll;
- much of foreign aid disappears, e.g., U.S. funds were used to buy 14 oceanfront villas on the super-luxurious Palm Jumeirah development in Dubai for wealthy Afghans¹²;
- that $76.5 billion of the $80 billion committed to Afghanistan has been spent on military and security and much of the remaining $3.5 billion on international consultants;
- most of the so-called reconstruction involved high-visibility glamor projects like highways, malls and luxury hotels;
- The United States is now spending nearly half a billion dollars a year in an attempt to establish the “rule of law” in Afghanistan. But a new government report suggests it may just be that much more money down the drain¹¹;
- Afghanistan ranks dead last amongst 163 countries on a food security index;
- Between 2004 and 2009, Afghanistan went from being 173rd out of 178 countries to being 181st out of 182 nations on the United Nations’ human development index¹³;
- Poverty is unimaginable – 13% of Afghans have access to clean drinking water and 6% to toilets¹⁴;
- Kabul is awash with a NGO mafia¹⁵ notwithstanding that some admirable work has been carried by the likes of OXFAM, DACCAR, etc.;
- poppy and hashish cultivation continue (of course, demand creates its own supply) with Afghanistan being the world’s biggest producer of both¹⁶;
- rapid hype about peace talks with ex-Taliban members not involved today in the Afghan resistance, most recently a fake Taliban who made it all the way to Karzai’s palace to “negotiate” underscoring how little the US/NATO know about the Taliban¹⁷;
- sham elections (mostly for Western consumption) with most Afghans disillusioned by electoral politics¹⁸;


13. These last two indicators are taken from Nick Turse, “How Much ‘Success’ Can Afghans Stand?” Tomdispatch.com (Sept-
dire poverty amidst ostentatious wealth (villas in Kabul and on the Dubai coast) as Afghan people suffer under a powerful elite tied to Karzai and the U.S.;

Karzai was a puppet from day one and continues to be notwithstanding his periodic outbursts;

Afghanistan ranks worst in gender inequality amongst 25 Asia Pacific nations;

civilians slaughtered by US/NATO are magically transformed into “insurgents”;

The AP, NYT, Washington Post, NPR and PBS continue to serve as mouthpieces of Obama's Pentagon;

the pitiful state and utter unreliability of the Afghan National Police which is thoroughly infiltrated by the Taliban and much of the Afghan National Army (exactly a replay of the South Vietnamese militaries when Nixon began his doomed Vietnamization strategy in 1970 with a significantly better South Vietnamese puppet army and the inability of the Afghan Army to recruit southern Pashtuns) AN OXFAM report compiled by Rebecca Barber described how Afghan police and army commit crimes such as child abuse, torture and killings with impunity;

U.S and NATO forces rely upon local war lords’ private militias to provide security;

a largely stalled reconstruction effort as a result of de facto Taliban control of 70-80% of Afghanistan where they collect taxes, enforce sharia, provide security, etc.;

periodic pleas for and/or reports about “flipping the Taliban” (Michael Semple, now at the Carr Institute - a flagship of the humanitarian imperialists - pushes that) will never work as it is now a war of national liberation (against US/NATO and its Quislings in Kabul);

and trying to establish a strong, central government in Afghanistan which is a fool’s errand.

The following analysis is divided into two major sections: a first one which the real war on the ground in Afghanistan during 2004-10; and a second part which critically documents the Obama/Pentagon efforts to control the public narrative of America's Afghan war.
The Course of the Real War on the Afghan Ground (Zero)

“I was still holding my grandson's hand – the rest was gone.”

What a U.S Air Force “precision” strike turned yet another Afghan wedding into on July 6, 200828

This section traces four phases in America’s Afghan war, then documents the soaring civilian impact deaths as of 2006 (Table 1). A critical analysis and contrast is then made of the various Afghan “body counts” (Table 2). The increasing reliance upon killing vehicles which are out of public sight – night raids by secretive JSOC troops and drone warfare – involving minimal U.S casualties is the latest phase. Obama’s two generals in Afghanistan - McChrystal and Petraeus - built a deadly and indiscriminate “killing machine” involving CIA and JSOC Special Forces teams27.

The American war in Afghanistan after the first three years (2001-3) has followed a demonstrable sequence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>U.S. offensive thrust</th>
<th>Resulted in problem of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-6</td>
<td>Recruit NATO troops</td>
<td>Growing Taliban success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-8</td>
<td>Heavy reliance upon air strikes</td>
<td>NATO criticism of civilian deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Obama/McChrystal shift to fewer air strikes, more ground attacks</td>
<td>Rising U.S military casualties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>In face of Taliban successes, Obama/Petraeus shift back to air war, drones and Special Forces/CIA night raids</td>
<td>Rising civilian deaths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the war dragged on foreign forces’ stated goals were scaled back, e.g., from building a democratic nation-building so dear to the humanitarian imperialists to buying time while Afghan police and army forces can be trained sufficiently for the US/NATO to exit. Foreign occupation forces have employed variants of sheer military force and counterinsurgency “win the hearts and minds” tactics. U.S/NATO tactics shifted from setting up forward operating bases in remote areas to shifting back to merely protecting cities and from reliance upon air strikes to favoring attacks by ground forces28. The US/NATO forces in 2008-9 had finally been forced to concede that civilian casualties were fuelling the Afghan resistance which led to a change of generals from McKiernan to McChrystal. “General McChrystal says that for every innocent person you kill, you create 10 new enemies”29. A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that each time U.S/NATO forces “accidentally” killed Afghan civilians, the resistance forces retaliated with six additional attacks upon foreign forces27.

But it goes way beyond mere wounding and killing. The resistance is strengthened by the knocking down doors of a home at midnight33, entering homes, pulling Afghan women be their hair, abductions and beatings, desecration of the Koran32, wanton shootings at checkpoints33, and simple everyday incidents of western arrogance and insensitivity. A lesser level of Afghan resistance is displayed by NATO’s slick weekly being primarily used in Kabul as food wrapping. The fortnightly Sada-e Azad – Voice of Freedom newspaper packed full of pro-NATO propaganda is put out by German psychological operations taskforce at NATO’s Kabul headquarters and costs 400,000 British pounds to produce 800,000 copies34.

26. See my “Another Wedding Party Massacre: 47 Afghan Civilians Killed; including the bride, 8 persons aged 14 to 18, 38 women and children,” Afghan Victim Memorial Project (July 14, 2008) at http://pubpages.unh.edu/~rwherold/Anotherweddingpartymassa-cie_July2008html


32. See Abdullah Obaidi, “Afghan Fury at Koran Burning Claims,” Institute for War & Peace Reporting (October 27, 2009) at http://www.iwpr.net/ar-English/Asia/Kafiristan/Koran/Anotherweddingpartymassacre.html


34. A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that each time U.S/NATO forces “accidentally” killed Afghan civilians, the resistance forces retaliated with six additional attacks upon foreign forces27.

35. Entering homes, pulling Afghan women be their hair, abductions and beatings, desecration of the Koran32, wanton shootings at checkpoints33, and simple everyday incidents of western arrogance and insensitivity. A lesser level of Afghan resistance is displayed by NATO’s slick weekly being primarily used in Kabul as food wrapping. The fortnightly Sada-e Azad – Voice of Freedom newspaper packed full of pro-NATO propaganda is put out by German psychological operations taskforce at NATO’s Kabul headquarters and costs 400,000 British pounds to produce 800,000 copies34.
Various body counts of civilian Afghan casualties have been published.35 My numbers of such deaths began rising in 2006 as Table 2 documents. Afghan civilian casualties at the hands of the U.S and NATO steadily rose from 2005-2007.

![Table 2: Afghan Civilians Killed by Direct US/NATO Actions (impact deaths)](image)

The Afghan war of national liberation began in 2006. Very little data other than my own was published for the years prior to 2006, though some counts were made of the numbers killed during the early U.S. bombing campaign which I reviewed in August 200236. Interestingly, a study employing a statistical population-based estimating procedure published in 2004 came to almost identical numbers as my own for the same time period37. Benini & Moulton calculated 3,994 civilians died from air and artillery bombardments, shooting, and other violence. In other words, the Herold count of 3,620 civilians killed by U.S. air and ground attacks alone is extremely close to the population-based estimate of Benini & Moulton.

The following Table 2 summarizes various counts of Afghan civilians killed by direct action (air and ground) by U.S and NATO forces from 2006 through the first ten months of 2010. The regular counts are mine and the UNAMA figures published for the years prior to 2006, though some counts were made of the numbers killed during the early U.S. bombing campaign which I reviewed in August 200236. Interestingly, a study employing a statistical population-based estimating procedure published in 2004 came to almost identical numbers as my own for the same time period37. Benini & Moulton calculated 3,994 civilians killed from air and artillery bombardments, shooting, and other violence. In other words, the Herold count of 3,620 civilians killed by U.S. air and ground attacks alone is extremely close to the population-based estimate of Benini & Moulton.

The following Table 2 summarizes various counts of Afghan civilians killed by direct action (air and ground) by U.S and NATO forces from 2006 through the first ten months of 2010. The regular counts are mine and that by the UNAMA38. A main difference between the two is that the UNAMA refuses to publish disaggregated data and thereby prevents any fact-checking (or reproducing its data). We are simply asked to believe based upon faith39. In addition, since 2009, the UNAMA official in Kabul in charge of such data collection is Ms. Georgette Gagnon, who previously worked with Human Rights Watch (HRW), an organization bankrolled by George Soros and with a long, notorious history of over- counting deaths caused by U.S enemies and under- counting those resulting from U.S actions (cases include Iraq in 1991, Kosovo in 1999, and Afghanistan during 2001-2007). UNAMA’s credibility as an impartial broker in Afghanistan is questioned by many in Kabul. In general the UNAMA figures (which include deaths caused by Afghan army and police forces and well as foreign forces) capture a little over half those included in my count (except for 2008), all the while greatly exaggerating deaths caused by the Taliban. Human Rights Watch only published figures for 2006 and 200740. The Afghan Human Rights Monitor (ARM), an independent human rights organization based in Kabul also publishes counts. A graphical summary of the Table 2 data is also included. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) publishes sporadic counts. NATO has reported data on civilians killed...
by NATO actions during 2008-2010, but the figures are not credible.\textsuperscript{41} For example, NATO stated that its forces killed 144 Afghan civilians in the first ten months of 2009, and 160 during the same period in 2010\textsuperscript{42}. It baldly asserted that during Jan-Nov. 18th in 2010, 59 civilians were killed in air sorties (fixed wing and helicopters), adding that “civilian deaths were down.” Naturally, this Pentagon “news” was relayed by the Associated Press and picked up by the Washington Post\textsuperscript{43}. A quick glance at Table 2 reveals that to be utter nonsense. The well-known research organization, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) released an academic report this year based upon declassified U.S. figures for Jan. 2009 – March 2010.\textsuperscript{44} It found 551 Afghan civilians being killed by U.S. forces, as compared to 1,195 in my data base; in other words, the U.S. “misses” over half those killed by its own actions.

Table 2. Various Counts of Afghan Civilian Casualties, 2006 - 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herold1</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>1,153</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRW</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>(230)</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARM</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIHRC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>283**</td>
<td>305**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO (Jan-Oct)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBER</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>441 (551*)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Herold, ARM and the NBER include only Afghan civilians killed by U.S and NATO militaries. Herold data is the midpoint between high and low counts. Human Rights Watch (HRW) counts Afghans killed by foreign forces. UNAMA, AIHRC and the ARM count Afghan civilians killed by pro-government forces which includes the Afghan army and police. NATO includes Afghan civilians killed by its own forces.

\textsuperscript{*}The 551 figure is for January 2008 – March 2009, I have annualized the NBER data, meaning derived the figure for twelve months in 2009.


42. The NATO report is dutifully transmitted by the Los Angeles Times in David S. Cloud, “Afghan Civilian Deaths Rise, U.S. statistics show an 11% increase this year in fatalities by Western forces,” Los Angeles Times (November 2, 2010).

43. See Jeremy Kuzmarov, “The Phoenix Program was a Disaster in Vietnam and Would Be in

44. The SSI figure is for January 2008 – March 2009, I have annualized the NBER data, meaning derived the figure for twelve months in 2009.


Afghan civilians today die primarily from aerial strikes (fixed wing, helicopters and drones) and helicopter-borne ground raids by secretive JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command) forces. The latter involve the notorious night-time assassination raids by Special Operations Forces and CIA units which are shrouded in deep secrecy and rarely get reported upon. JSOC also operates some 20 secret jails across Afghanistan.59 Under Obama such secret operations known in the military as “man hunters” have sharply increased46. The political usefulness is that such secret operations keep the American public in the dark. These CIA or Special Operations Forces units in the infamous Project Phoenix mimic the CIA-trained Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) employed in Vietnam which murdered from 20-40,000 Vietnamese civilians57. Once in a while details emerge of the massacres perpetrated by such units, e.g., TF-373 comprised mostly of 7th Special Forces Group members is amply written up in the liberated WikiLeaks documents48. For example, on June 17, 2007, launched a mission

...hundreds of miles south in Paktika province. The target was a notorious Libyan fighter, Abu Laith al-Libi. The unit was armed with a new weapon, known as Himars – High Mobility Artillery Rocket System – a pod of six missiles on the back of a small truck. The plan was to launch five rockets at targets in the village of Nangar Khel where TF 373 believed Libi was hiding and then to send in ground troops. The result was that they failed to find Libi but killed six Taliban fighters and then, when they approached the rubble of a madrasa, they found “initial assessment of 7 x NC KIA” which translates as seven non-combatants killed in action. All of them were children. One of them was still alive in the rubble: “The Med TM immediately cleared debris from the mouth and performed CPR.” After 20 minutes, the child died49.

Another glimpse was provided when details leaked out about a US Special Forces assault on a party on February 12, 2010 that left a local district attorney, a local police commander and three Afghan women dead (a teenage girl and two of whom were pregnant)50. The U.S troops sealed-off the compound after the raid, extracted bullets from their victims and tried to cover-up the slaughter51. At first the U.S. military denied the killings but persistent reports in the British press – not the American media – eventually led to the admission. Dozens of other examples could be provided.

A Scottish aid worker, Linda Norgrove, was killed on October 8, 2010 by a U.S. Special Forces soldier, but the U.S. military initially blamed the death on her Taliban captors, even concocting lurid stories. Fifty-six Afghan children were killed in a midnight raid on April 9, 2009 by US/NATO forces after Obama became Commander-in-Chief52. Details on this deadly raid in a village west of Khost city may be found in The Afghan Victim Memorial Project data base53.

As Obama’s Afghan “surge” unfolded, more fighting and more civilian deaths were certain (as well as renewed efforts by the United States to redefine, omit and suppress reporting upon such). The U.S mainstream media has been mostly be a cooperative partner in the Pentagon’s news management, though of course exceptions exist (such examples are cited in footnotes, e.g., Gareth Porter, Glenn Greenwald, Chris Hedges, etc.). Many in Afghan see no realistic prospect for peace as long as foreign soldiers remain in Afghanistan and the Taliban have no incentive to compromise when they are in a winning position44. An additional 30,000 U.S troops – the Obama surge – means nothing in a country where military experts estimate that ~500,000 foreign soldiers
would be necessary to quell the resistance\(^5\). The simple truth is that the U.S/NATO like the Russians twenty years ago does not have a sufficient number of troops to hold territory\(^6\). As Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former ambassador to the USSR, put it, both invaders had tactics without strategy\(^7\).

While much continuity with Bush policies exists, some opportunistic changes in the execution of the Afghan war have been made by Obama. Most are inspired by the aim to better market/spin “the good war” to the American public\(^8\) and especially to European publics. For example, under McChrystal U.S/NATO forces were relying less upon deadly air strikes which are 4-10 times more deadly for Afghan civilians than are ground attacks\(^9\). As a consequence, the monthly total of Afghan civilians killed by US/NATO action declined moderately at the same time as the monthly death toll of occupation forces rose (Table 3). \textit{U.S occupation troop deaths} from hostile action have soared since 2007: 2007, 83; 2008, 133; 2009, 268 and in 2010, 440\(^6\).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Afghan Civilian Deaths</th>
<th>US/NATO troop deaths</th>
<th>Ratio of (1)/(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>91-97</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.1-5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>95-138</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.9-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>112-120</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.3-5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2009</td>
<td>77-82</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.4-8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2009</td>
<td>147-220</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.4-9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>109-133</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.3-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>47-56</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.7-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2009</td>
<td>64-66</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.9-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>99-118</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.6-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2009</td>
<td>62-69</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.0-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2009</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>57-61</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.8-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>82-88</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.6-1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>28-39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.8-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.1-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>40-47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.9-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>68-98</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0.8-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2010</td>
<td>55-61</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.7-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>82-89</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.1-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2010</td>
<td>78-86</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.7-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>149-165</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2.4-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>54-61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.1-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>63-65</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.6-1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Afghan civilians from my Afghan Victim Memorial Project database and foreign occupation troop fatalities from ICasualties.org at http://wwwicasualties.org/oef/
As a result, the ratio of Afghan civilians killed per occupation soldier death - a measure/metric of the lethality of America’s Afghan war for Afghan civilians relative to that for US/NATO occupation troops - has been falling from above 5 during late 2008 to about 1:3 during March 2009. In 2008, this ratio was 2.9-3.5; 4.4-5.6 in 2007; and 3.4-4.0 in 2006\(^6\). When McChrystal took over the ratio fell to under 1, however when Petraeus replaced McChrystal the ratio quickly moved above 1. Combating the Afghan resistance with traditional ground operations is simply much more dangerous for foreign forces than relying upon the more deadly air strikes and night-time assassination raids, both of which have soared under Petraeus. The data for September and October 2010 is grossly underestimated insofar as many civilians killed by U.S. Marines who have replaced the British in the Sangin area of Helmand have not been reported upon though local villagers complain bitterly about such deaths\(^62\).

Petreaus has discarded the winning-hearts-and-minds counterinsurgency (COIN) approach, replacing it with a deadly trio of blunt force killing – air strikes, drones and Special Operations midnight raids\(^63\). Such is hardly surprising as when Petraeus took over in Iraq (January 2007 until September 2008) monthly civilian deaths caused by U.S./NATO actions doubled\(^64\). Night raids by U.S Special Operations’ forces have risen now to about 200 a month, a five-fold rise since 2009\(^65\). In 2010, the rate of drone strikes in Pakistan rose seven-fold over 2009\(^66\). According to Pakistani authorities, 708 people were killed in 51 drone strikes during 2009. The toll for nine months in 2010 has been 600 or more in 75 strikes\(^67\). Countless civilians are slaughtered because drone operators in Nevada and Florida often cannot distinguish clearly between “insurgents” and civilians\(^68\). If drones now even kill U.S. Marines, one can only wonder about the carnage perpetrated upon Afghan and Pashtun civilians\(^69\). Drone strikes’ remain shrouded in official secrecy\(^70\), U.S. counterinsurgency experts, David Kilcullen and Andrew Exum also cite the 700 figure\(^71\). Moreover, a strong case can be that besides further fuelling the Af-Pak resistance by producing enormously high levels of anger and rage against the United States” as even recognized by Kilcullen and Exum\(^72\), by the standards of international law, drone warfare is illegal\(^73\).

Obama stated that US/NATO forces in Afghanistan were wagers of peace\(^2\). America’s propaganda ministers and generals cover-up that the Taliban & Co. are winning in Afghanistan\(^73\). Neil Faulkner editor of Military Times magazine interpreted the battle of Marjah in Helmand province.

In reality, Marjah is a vaguely-defined area of villages, markets and family compounds. If there are tens of thousands of people, they are spread across 125 sq miles. Marjah was invented because a military operation has to have a clear-cut goal to be deemed a victory. President Obama had doubled the total US troop deployment, but public support was waning. The generals needed a victory, so they created Marjah and planned Operation Moshtarak to capture it. A phantom city was needed because the enemy is a phantom. A task force is assembled and motors into bandit country. If it is too small, it risks annihilation. If it is too big, it finds itself punching the air. A golden rule of guerrilla warfare is that you fight only if you are certain to win. So if it is too small, the invaders of Afghanistan are waging a war against an enemy who is never there. “Suppose we were (as we might be),” wrote T. E. Lawrence, “an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to

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64. Derived from data provided by Iraqi Body Count. During Jan-Dec 2007, average monthly civilian deaths caused by “coalititon forces” hovered around 50 a month, whereas during the Petraeus stint (Jan 2007 – Sept 2008) they were about 100 a month.


68. A rare case study of such a drone strike which killed 12-23 Afghan civilians in Nalkund province on February 21, 2010 is provided in David S. Cloud, “Predator Drones: High-tech Tools and Human Error,” Los Angeles Times (April 10, 2011) at http://
the head. We might be a vapor, blowing where we listed... Ours should be a war of detachment. We were to contain the enemy by the silent threat of a vast, unknown desert ...”6.

Powerful parallels exist between the US/NATO offensives in Helmand and Kandahar now with that of the Soviets in the Panjshir valley in 1982. As the veteran international journalist and writer Edward Girardet noted, during the 1980s

The Soviets thought they could subdue Afghanistan through brute force, political indoctrination, and bribes. They wanted to put across the notion that their form of government had far more to offer than the jihad embraced by the mujahideen. "They lost”.

The much heralded battle of Kandahar promised to be more of the same.

How pathetic to hear U.S. troops whine that the Taliban are too weak to engage foreign forces in a conventional, manly manner and then trumpet loudly that in every pitched battle the Taliban are soundly defeated. Yet, Afghanistan is more dangerous now than it has ever been during the American war according to international organizations and humanitarian groups70. Faced with superior force, the resistance simply melts away and then returns when the foreign occupation forces withdraw69.

The Taliban have five aces in their hand: (1) a rugged territory which they know like the palm of a hand; (2) the Afghan hatred of foreign domination (not the West); (3) the Afghan belief in taking revenge for a misdeed wrought upon a person's honor (especially family members); and (4) the rejection of a foreign-imposed, corrupt minority regime. Fifth, unlike the U.S military which requires about 7 to 8 support personnel for every combat soldier, the Taliban travel lightly and are extremely mobile. The Taliban are widely recognized to have been able to restore security to the areas under their control, as stated by a resident of Bala Murgab to a Spanish journalist,

We all know that the Taliban do bad things, that sometimes they're cruel, but since they arrived in our village, we sleep with the doors open with no fear of being killed or robbed. And that is much more than the government and the foreigners have done for us81.

The situation is far worse as many "...villagers see the foreigners as the main source of insecurity: the presence of foreign troops means IEDs, ambushes and airstrikes...” in the words of a long-time Afghan scholar82. As Patrick Coburn reports, “One hears again and again Afghans saying that the Taliban may not be liked but that the US is distrusted, even hated”83.

The Taliban's strategy is to spread out foreign occupation forces across space – the Taliban now have a presence in the north (Kunduz) and in the west (Farah); (1) to lengthen U.S supply lines making them vulnerable; (2) to create just enough uncertainty and danger across Afghanistan so as to prevent any reconstruction; and (3) to kill as many foreigners as possible by primarily using IEDs and suicide attacks. On each count, the Taliban is succeeding. For example, as the American war drags on, the following graph reconstructed from WikiLeaks' liberated documents clearly confirms the spread of com-
bat from 2004 to 2009\(^\text{84}\). As the countryside became more dangerous, supplies have been increasingly air dropped (the number of airdrops rose from 99 in 2005 to 800 in 2008)\(^\text{85}\). Most recently, the U.S. military itself conceded that violence across Afghanistan was at an all-time high and that the insurgency’s geographic reach and sophistication had grown (curiously adding that “security was slowly spreading across the country”)\(^\text{86}\). By late 2008, Taliban IEDs were already effective at disabling America’s new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles\(^\text{87}\).

A map produced by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) released on September 10, 2009, showed substantial Taliban activity in 97% of Afghanistan, compared to 72% in 2008 and 54% in 2007.\(^\text{88}\) A concrete example is Chak in Wardak province, a scant 40 miles west of Kabul where three years ago the Taliban controlled the district was restricted to the hours of darkness whereas now, as the independent reporter James Ferguson, tells us the Taliban rule day and night\(^\text{89}\). Already in late 2008, the independent journalist, Nir Rosen who had travelled widely in Afghanistan, noted that “once you leave Kabul, you’re entering Taliban territory”\(^\text{91}\). A recent report by aid agencies working in Afghanistan also emphasizes growing insecurity and soaring civilian casualties\(^\text{91}\). A marvelous account of what Taliban-controlled Afghanistan looks like now and what it will look like in the future after the occupation has been provided by The Guardian’s Ghaith Abdul-Ahad\(^\text{92}\).


The Spread of Combat in Afghanistan and Areas under Taliban Control
Obama/Pentagon Efforts at Controlling the Narrative of America’s Afghan War

“This is all a war of perceptions” – General Stanley McChrystal

How does the American government seek to set the war narrative?94. First by spending billions on propaganda. During 2004-2009 the Pentagon’s annual public relations budget increased by 63% to over $4.7 billion95. For example, at an abandoned Air Force base in San Antonio (TX), the Pentagon’s “Hometown News” organization publishes glowing stories about the military. In 2009, it planned to put out 5,400 press releases, 3,000 television releases and 1,600 radio interviews – 50% more than in 2007. Some ~$500 million is spent for “psychological operations” targeting foreign audiences. In Afghanistan, funds are being used to train Afghan journalists to engage in “responsible journalism.” Under the Obama clock, the efforts expended to manage the news coming out from Afghanistan - or to spin the war - have soared as compared to during the administration of his predecessor96. Most of the press is content to simply parrot the releases and statements made by US military spokespersons. The U.S. military is more than willing to physically silence oppositional media, as for example with the bombing in April 1999 of Serbia’s State Television and Radio Station building (killing 16 civilians and wounding another 16) and two years later bombing the Al Jazeera office in Kabul in November 200198. As regards combat reporting, the Pentagon profiles reporters, accepting as “embeds” only those deemed by the military as being neutral or positive. The U.S military has also fine-tuned its procedure dealing with Afghan civilians they kill: first say nothing; then when reports being presenting compelling evidence, deny; when more evidence surfaces about civilians dying which cannot be denied, blame the Taliban for the deaths: finally when the presented evidence mounts, minimize the numbers killed — as for example in the August 2009 massacre in Aizabad where the Pentagon initially reported the U.S airstrike killed 5 Afghan civilians, not the close to 100100 — and promise an investigation (carried out of course by themselves).

A typical example of Pentagon and official U.S mainstream failing to report a U.S attack which resulted in civilian casualties was revealed in recently liberated documents by WikiLeaks. A British Guardian report described a midnight raid by Special Forces upon Jaldak, south of Qalat in Zabul Province. The early hour raid resulted in five dead males: “having moved the women and children to safety, the force entered the buildings, killing five armed militants ….” as relayed by the Associated Press of the Zabul operation. The early hour raid resulted in five dead males: “having moved the women and children to safety, the force entered the buildings, killing five armed militants ….” as relayed by the Associated Press.


94. See “War as an Edsel”: the Marketing and Consumption of Modern American Wars (Durham: unpublished manuscript, Department of Economics, University of New Hampshire, April 9, 2005) available at http://pubpages.unh.edu/∼mwherold/


96. Discussed for example in Matthew Nasuti, America’s Happy War in Afghanistan: American Government-Sponsored Airstrikes and Anonymity. No matter how many times government claims about attacks turn out to be false, the American media repeats them.”Salon.com (December 26, 2009) at http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2009/12/26/airstrikes. Individual reporters working for mainstream western media, even the Associated Press, are sometimes able to publish stories deviating from the main war narrative. For example, Rahmatullah Naikzad’s photo of men killed in a U.S
Contrary to U.S. military thinking which asserts that “the press heavily reports on civilian casualty incidents…civilian casualty incidents are highly ‘mediagenic’,” a history exists of mainstream U.S media being megaphones for the Pentagon, e.g., Laura King of the Associated Press and the Los Angeles Times being a case in point. I have provided a concrete case study of how the mainstream engaged in immaculate deception about the killing of Afghan civilians on March 24, 2010 and November 23, 2001, in Chagoti Ghar, Khost province.

Three main subterfuges have been used by the U.S and NATO militaries, the compliant corporate media and organizations like Human Rights Watch, to excuse the killing and wounding of innocent Afghan civilians. The first is to express righteous anger over “them” killing civilians intentionally whereas “we” never intentionally target civilians. The second is to assert that the nastardly Taliban and their associates employ civilians as human shields. A third means used by the Pentagon and compliant U.S mainstream media has been to simply omit whenever possible written reports and especially photos of the victims of U.S/NATO military actions (as below), all the while amply publishing stories and photos of Afghan civilians killed by IED’s or suicide bombers (good bodies). In other words, as pointed out long ago by Edward Herman there are good bodies and bad bodies in America’s wars.

The intentionality argument is often couched in the language of justifiable collateral damage, regrettable but necessary. Since the killing was collateral, it cannot be intentional goes the story. Least-cost considerations (in terms of U.S. military deaths and U.S. dollars) by the US and NATO militaries directly translates into tens of thousands of Afghan civilian casualties. How? During the initial phases of the U.S. bombing campaign but still today, U.S. warplanes dropped powerful bombs in civilian-rich areas of Afghan civilian casualties. How? During the initial phases of the U.S. bombing campaign but still today, U.S. warplanes dropped powerful bombs in civilian-rich areas with little concern for Afghan civilians. Today, the aerial bombing is more related to close air support called-in by ground forces as a means to defeat the enemy without having to fight him on the ground and likely suffer casualties. The killing of civilians by the United States has long been excused away as “tragic errors.” More significantly, a new term was coined around 1990, collateral damage (which was linked to unintentional), which soon became an essential part of the U.S war narrative. The U.S/NATO war managers dredge out the tired old “intent” argument. As Edward Herman noted, …it is claimed by the war managers that these deaths and injuries are not deliberate, but are only “collateral” to another end, they are treated by the mainstream media, NGOs, new humanitarians, and others as a lesser evil than cases where civilians are openly targeted. But this differential treatment is a fraud, even if we accept the sometimes disputable claim of inadvertence (occasionally even acknowledged by officials to be false, as described below). Even if not the explicit target, if collateral civilian deaths are highly probable and statistically predictable they are clearly acceptable and intentional. If in 500 raids on Afghan villages alleged to harbor al Qaeda cadres it is likely that civilians will die in 450 of them, those deaths are an integral component of the plan and the clear responsibility of the planners and executioners. As law professor Michael Tonry has said, “In the criminal law, purpose and knowledge are equally culpable states of mind.”

Aerial bombing in the name of liberating Afghans will continue with little regard for Afghan civilians who for the Western politico-military elites (and general public) remain simply invisible in the empty space which is an “increasingly aerially occupied
Death in Wartime (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2006): xx.


A myth has circulated since the beginning of the U.S. bombing campaign in Afghanistan in October 2001. The myth is endlessly repeated by the U.S. occupation forces, corporate media, the Pentagon, defense intellectual pundits, the Cruise Missile Left, the humanitarian interventionists, and even some in the United Nations: Afghan insurgents hide amongst civilians whom they use as human shields. To begin with, the assertion is never empirically documented but just merely stated as a self-evident truth. Secondly, the implication is that an insurgent or Taliban fighter, resisting the U.S./NATO invasion should stand alone on a mountain ridge, his AK-47 raised to the sky, and engage in a “fair” act of war with an Apache attack helicopter or A-10 Warthog and see who prevails. Thirdly, what is conveniently omitted is that the insurgents have lived in the area, have friends and families in the communities, and that such a local support base is precisely what gives a guerrilla insurgency (along with knowledge of the local terrain) its classic advantage. Such local connection means that the insurgents will (unlike the US/NATO occupation forces) go to great lengths to not put local people in danger.

Time magazine produced a strong, timely piece of gruesome propaganda when it put the face of a young Afghan girl with her nose cut off “by the Taliban” on its magazine cover. At the time, the Taliban denied having done so, but the mainstream media ignored the denial. We now know that the girl was punished by her father for running away from her abusive husband numerous times, as reported by the independent Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Any retraction from the likes of Time, the Associated Press, the Washington Post, etc.? Of course not.

The mainstream war narrative directed at Euro-American public resembles a sea of lies: Obama’s mega and mini lies, NATO lies, UNAMA lies, NBER academic lies, Associated Press lies, mainstream media lies, and Lara Logan (of CBS 60 Minutes) lies. The sea is stocked with lies of omission and of commission employed to construct the war narrative. A sample listing of news as instruction not information follows though each merits an extended discussion:

- Announcing the killing of “important” Taliban or Al Qaeda leader alleged to have been eliminated by a drone in the Af-Pak border region but who then resurfaces weeks or months later (the multiple lives of resistance leaders);
- Announcing with great fanfare the capture of “Taliban,” who are then soon released, e.g., Petraeus’ captured “Taliban” have been over 80% civilian. But this now intentional as US night raids are aimed at Afghan civilians (who are held briefly in order to extract information);
- Proclaiming victory in taking over (the fictional) city of Marjah a success then and Kandahar now and so many other futile “surges” during the past nine years (of areas allegedly cleared but which are then re-occupied by the Taliban);
- Misrepresenting U.S human cost of war (let alone the carnage in Afghanistan) by hiring mercenaries (including a staggering number of private contractors- by late 2009, 64,000 U.S troops and 104,000 contractors shared the Afghan battlefield, the
highest ratio of contractors to military personnel in U.S. history\(^{118}\) and Green Card soldiers\(^{119}\), outsourcing combat to lackey nations (e.g., most recently Slovakia, Czech Republic even Mongolia\(^{120}\));

- Enemy body counts bearing no connection with reality solemnly proclaimed at Bagram or in Kabul reminiscent of Saigon’s “Five O’clock Follies”\(^{121}\);

- Widespread torture and secret imprisonment (see Omar Khadr case) with impunity; somehow the CIA torture tapes just disappeared and no one is held accountable; far less transparency at Obama’s secret penal colony, Bagram, and hidden CIA bases in Afghanistan where torture was routine\(^{122}\). Bagram prison has been massively enlarged under Obama and represents a black hole where “illegal enemy combatants” are incarcerated, cannot see lawyers, have no trials and never see any evidence there may be against them\(^{123}\). The U.S. continues to transfer persons picked up in raids to the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS), widely acknowledged to engage in vicious torture\(^{24}\);

- U.S. abuse of detainees has been routine at Afghanistan bases\(^{125}\);

- Hiding the fact that all too many US soldiers from General “mad dog” Mattis who famously proclaimed he enjoyed killing\(^{26}\) to the Stryker Brigade boys who took photos posing with dead Afghan civilians\(^{127}\) to the US Army Green Beret who shot an Afghan and cut off his ear as a trophy\(^{128}\), and the trigger-happy helicopter pilots, enjoy killing enemy Afghans;

- Massive Pentagon propaganda effort to magnify or invent civilian deaths caused by resistance side and to completely suppress reports of those killed by US/NATO forces;

- Trumpeting on-going discussions with “moderate” Taliban (these Taliban are ex-Taliban now dimly viewed by the fighting Taliban) when the real Taliban have repeatedly stated that no negotiations will take as long as Afghanistan is an occupied country;

- The assiduous use of language to sell war (e.g., the resistance is terrorism), foreign peacemaking forces not occupation forces, etc.;

- Pursuing government secrecy with a zeal greater than even George W. Bush\(^{129}\);

- Hotel journalism versus that by real independent, un-embedded journalists like Jerome Starkey (The Times), Chris Sands (The National), David Lindorff (CounterPunch), Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (The Guardian), John Pilger, or James Ferguson (The Independent). An important element used by the US/NATO militaries is to rely upon embedded journalists who provide accounts favorable to these militaries (this is NOT independent journalism). A favorite example of such an embedded mouthpiece for the US military is CBS’s 60 minutes’ Lara Logan, a great fan (nay, groupie) of U.S Special Forces who make the news lady breathless\(^{130}\). Other stellar exemplars of such toady journalists are Laura King and Jason Straziuso;

- The American media regularly offers the pabulum that the Taliban are a few dollars a-day rented fighters when the truth is that they are a disciplined, well-trained and equipped fighting force focused upon seizing power either by conquest or by negotiation\(^{131}\);

- Failing to note that there are now at best 50-100 Al Qaeda cadres/fighters in all of Afghanistan\(^{132}\);

- The different ways in which the American media and the European media reported upon the massive trove of information released by WikiLeaks on July 25, 2010. Lara Logan of CBS focused only upon atrocities committed by the Taliban, which amounts...
to propaganda not journalism\textsuperscript{133}. As expected, the New York Times selectively reported on WikiLeaks documents\textsuperscript{134}:

- And generally, a discourse about politics as a Debordian spectacle\textsuperscript{135}. A total disconnect exists between reality in Afghanistan and what Obama/the Pentagon “instruct” the America public, e.g., most recently the Obama war “review” noting “signs of progress”. As Floyd pointed out, a striking inversion is at work: the very success of the Afghan resistance, its fierceness is evidence of their desperation, their ultimate and imminent collapse\textsuperscript{136}.

The vehemence with which the Obama administration seeks to control the war narrative is revealed by the fierce reaction to the posting by WikiLeaks of internal war documents.

Each of these warrants extended discussion. Let me focus upon images and language in service of America’s war. Western mainstream press delights in printing photos of civilians especially children hurt or killed by Taliban attacks as for example the one below from Yahoo!News. But do we ever see photos of the victims of US/NATO attacks? Of course not even though such photos are taken and posted outside the U.S. (as for example in my data base containing over 1,000 photos of Afghanistan under US bombing and occupation).

\textbf{Headline: “Wounded Afghan boy lies on hospital bed”}

A wounded Afghan boy lies on a hospital bed in the Emam Sehab district of Kunduz province November 13, 2010. A bomb hidden on a motorcycle killed at least eight civilians and wounded 18 in northern Kunduz province, a district official said. The bomb apparently targeted a militia leader, who was among those killed.

Source: \text{http://news.yahoo.com/nphotos/slideshow/photo//101113/ids_photos_wl/r3379912763.jpg/_ylt=Ak8_D5j0ufzCL3HIfPMe-QBS5Z4
Photo by a stringer for Reuter

Contrast the above with these photos from RAWA. Such photos rarely appear in the U.S., but do in Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. Such photos will not be pub-
lished in America as they depict “bad bodies” which might make the public uncomfortable. 137 Analysis of mainstream U.S. news-magazine photo coverage during the early years of the Afghan conflict clearly revealed that the printed photographs offered prompts for the prevailing government version of events, e.g., our troops don’t kill and maim. 138

Headline: “US Special Forces brutally kill 10 Afghan civilians in Narang district”

On Dec. 27, 2009, at around 2:30 of mid night, US Special Forces raided Ghazi Khan Ghondi village of Narang District in Kunar province of Afghanistan. They enter the civilian houses and kill ten civilians, among them eight were school boys, one a poor farmer and a 12-year-old rancher. They all have been shot in the head. Although the US occupation forces denied any involvement, but Kai Eide, special UN representative announced in a press conference that the “international forces” were engaged in the incident and “a preliminary United Nations investigation has found that eight students were among 10 Afghan civilians killed in Kunar province.” Further photos and details at “US Special Forces Brutally Kill 10 Afghan Civilians in Narang – Photo Gallery,” RAWA (January 2, 2010) at http://www.uruknet.info/?p=61746.


Language is selectively employed to construct the Obama, Pentagon, mainstream media war narrative. Almost every wire service report by the Associated Press includes “…the Taliban regularly exaggerate casualties caused by their attacks.” A festival of Orwellian language is deployed by the Pentagon and Commander-in-Chief Obama. Obama was described as engaging in “Operation Redefinition” (by Jon Stewart on March 31, 2009139). Obama simply redefines the old Bush policies and tactics in Afghanistan which largely remain in place.

On December 3, 2010, redefinition was upped another notch by Obama who snuck into Afghanistan for a four-hour secret visit at the U.S. base, Bagram, where clad in a bomber jacket he proclaimed the U.S. was winning the war, amidst overwhelming contrary evidence. Losing is winning and U.S. troops in Afghanistan are in Obama’s “wagers of peace.”

The war narrative regularly employs such phrases as “Taliban infested area” (why not rewrite as “foreign occupation force infested area”?). The use of the word “terrorist” for a military opponent is systematic, as is use of the adjective “peacekeeping” or far worse Obama’s “wagers of peace” instead of occupation forces. Combat troop increases are now labeled under Pentagon-Speak as “combat enablers.”140 When a US/NATO helicopter is shot down the narrative is a helicopter made a “hard landing”, instead of being shot down. Media spokespersons from the opposing warring side are identified differently: a Taliban “mouthpiece” versus a “NATO spokesman.” The persons fighting the foreign invaders are “terrorists” not resistance fighters though of course in 1980’s the Afghan fighting the Russian invader were called “freedom fighters.”

Another standard mantra is “The Taliban often exaggerates the details of attacks and play down the numbers of their own casualties.”141 But let’s rewrite the above substituting Americans/NATO for Taliban.

Additional resources include:

- 139. To see click on http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=222759&title=redefinition

139. To see click on http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=222759&title=redefinition
Conclusion: The Politics of What Matters and Where

William Dalrymple argues the comparison of Afghanistan today is less with Vietnam and more with Great Britain's Great Game of 1839-42. In the end, the main determinant of the course of America's Afghan war will be bodies. The increasing number of Afghan bodies matters and fuels the resistance, resulting in what Anatol Lieven of King's College (London) aptly observed, Afghanistan

"is becoming a sort of surreal hunting estate, in which the U.S. and NATO breed the very terrorists they then track down."144.

Space does not allow an elaboration here, that the U.S attack upon and later occupation of Afghanistan in response to 9/11 terrorist attack was hoped-for by Al Qaeda as it would cause a worldwide Muslim backlash as detailed in Syed Saleem Shahzad's authoritative book, Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, published in May 2011.145.

The American public (except for the old left, the Unitarians and Quakers, a couple other progressive churches, folks at the Brave New Foundation, the peace movement, RAWA's American supporters, and many on the libertarian Right) does not (and never care(d) about civilians killed by US military. But for liberals, Obama can do no wrong. They only care about U.S troop deaths. G.W Bush knew this early on – see his banning of photos of dead U.S. military personnel at Dover Air Base. Official U.S military bodies (killed or injured) matter in the United States. Afghan bodies count for nothing with the American general public. Every effort will be undertaken by Obama/Pentagon to minimize US domestic political opposition to foreign war-making. This began in the post-Vietnam era with the shift from a drafted army to one relying upon professional "volunteers," who represent a narrow sliver of the country's population. In recent mid-term elections in the United States, only 6.5% of voters mentioned the Afghan war as being of concern.

It's all about controlling the US war narrative, something very different from the truth. A first successful ploy was to entice the NATO countries into fighting in Afghanistan in 2004. The count of war dead by nationality showed that NATO stalwarts like Britain, Canada and Holland did a disproportionate amount of the heavy lifting. Some NATO countries understood the ploy and limited their contribution to non-fighting areas at the time, e.g., Germany and Spain. But as the war grinded on and NATO country publics turned decidedly against it, Bush first and Obama later sought creative new ways to minimize officially acknowledged U.S. military casualties. Such measures included: escalating reliance upon private contractors (privatizing American war-making) and assorted Rambos under Obama (de facto mercenaries); ramping up the use Green Card soldiers; and begging for troops from other nations. The use of contractors is especially convenient as these are not reported as U.S. military casualties and are outside any public scrutiny, a deliberate ploy to hide the costs of war.

The mainstream war narrative directed at Euro-American public resembles a sea of lies: Obama's mega and mini lies, NATO lies, UNAMA lies, NBER academic lies, Associated Press lies, mainstream media lies, and Lara Logan (of CBS 60 Minutes) lies. The sea is stocked with lies of omission and of commission employed to construct the war narrative.
Most twentieth century counterinsurgency wars have failed (the two exceptions being the Americans in the Philippines and the British in Malaya). The resistance wins because it knows the home territory and the invader cannot overcome the “foreign invader” label.\(^{151}\) History carries some potent lessons.

General Sergei Akhromeyev, commander of the Soviet armed forces, address(ed) the Soviet Politburo in 1986. “There is no piece of land in Afghanistan that has not been occupied by one of our soldiers at some time or another. Nevertheless much of the territory stays in the hands of the terrorists. We control the provincial centres, but we cannot maintain political control over the territory we seize.”… General Akhromeyev demanded extra troops – or the war in Afghanistan would continue “for a very, very long time”. And how’s this for a quotation from, say, a British or US commander in Helmand today? “Our soldiers are not to blame. They’ve fought incredibly bravely in adverse conditions. But to occupy towns and villages temporarily has little value in such a vast land where the insurgents can just disappear into the hills.” Yes, of course, this was Gen Akhromeyev in 1986\(^{152}\).

The American war in Afghanistan will end after NATO country militaries withdraw. This process began with the Dutch in 2010, the Canadians in 2011 and will accelerate in 2011. The Germans have now announced an exit date for 2011\(^{153}\). No amount of purchased or bribed Croatian, Mongolian, Lithuanian, Georgian and other such troops can replace the old NATO contingents.

In the end, bodies tell the story, America’s lost war in Afghanistan will cease, cut by the scissors of Afghan bodies and mounting U.S. military bodies (Figure 1).

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152. Fisk, op. cit