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

El relato bélico de Obama y del Pentágono, la verdadera guerra y dónde importan realmente las muertes de los civiles afganos

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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 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; los medios del Pentágono para controlar el relato bélico; fases de la guerra de los EEUU en Afganistán.

1. The universality of war propaganda is striking as a comparison between the Russian war narrative than and the U.S/NATO war narrative today reveals, details in Glenn Greenwald, "The Universality of War Propaganda. A soldier with the Russian army in Afghanistan recounts what they believed about their mission," *Salon.com* (October 28, 2009) at http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2009/10/28/propaganda



2. See "The American Occupation of Afghanistan and the Birth of a National Liberation Movement," *Global Research* (September 7, 2010) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=20946>. The article is cited some 8,900 times in a Google search (at 9:43 AM EST on November 19, 2010).

3. As beautifully expressed in "The American public is conditionally tolerant of [military] casualties and consistently indifferent to collateral damage," Dr. Karl P. Mueller, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Maxwell Air Force Base.

4. In "Obama's Unspoken Trade-Off: Dead US/NATO Occupation Troops versus Dead Afghan Civilians?" *RAWA News* (August 23, 2009) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2009/08/23/obamaand-8217-s-unspoken-trade-off-dead-us-nato-occupation-troops-versus-dead-afghan-civilianso.phtml>

5. See my "Obama's Afghan War. The New Metric of Civilian Casualties," *Global Research* (June 12, 2009) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=13957>

6. See Spencer Ackerman, "Spin War Shift: Military now Bragging about Afghan Air Strikes," *Wired.com* (September 1, 2010) at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/09/nato-brags-on-air-strikes-hits-talibans-civilian-casualties/>, Noah Schactman, "Bombs Away: Afghan Air War Peaks with 1,000 Strikes in October," *Wired.com* (November 10, 2010) at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/11/bombs-away-afghan-air-war-peaks-with-1000-strikes-in-october/>

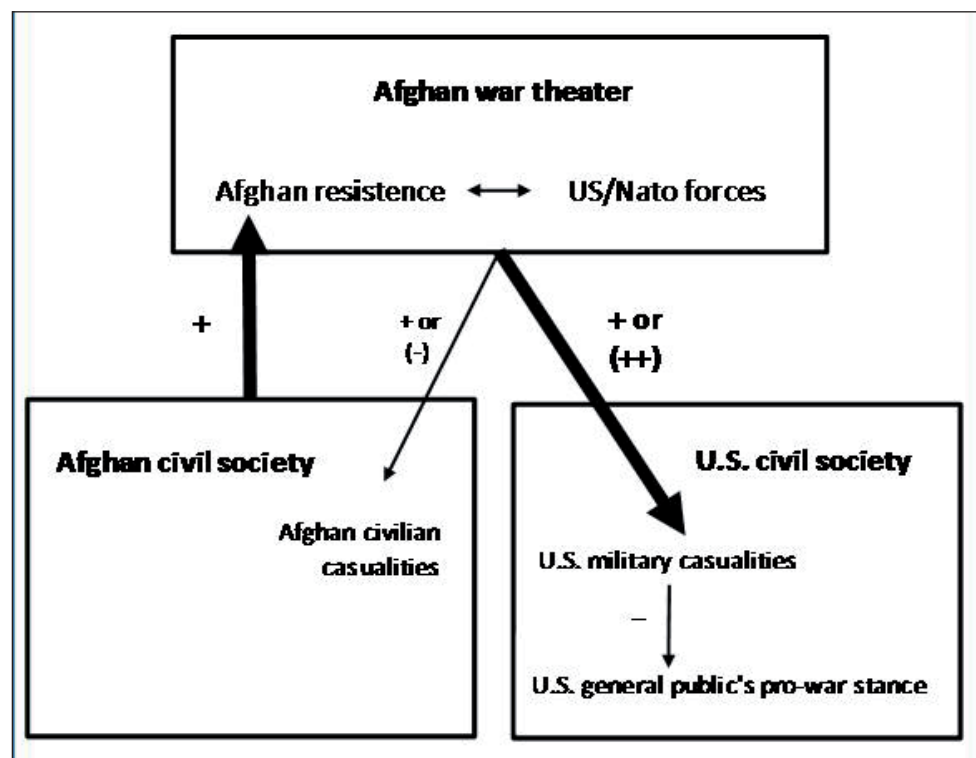
7. Emphasis added by M.H. <http://accuracy.org/newsrelease.php?articleId=2390>. Rosen is author of the new book *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World* (Nation Books, 2010)

8. The three main fallacies driving America's Afghan war have been rebutted in Johann Hari, "The Three Fallacies That Have Driven the War in Afghanistan," *The Independent* (October 21, 2009) at <http://www.independent.co.uk>

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 essay². 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



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-war³. McChrystal's alleged effort to reduce Afghan civilian casualties (-) was a trade-off for rising U.S military casualties (++) as I demonstrated a year ago⁴. 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 casualties⁵. 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



independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-the-three-fallacies-that-have-driven-the-war-in-afghanistan-1806191.html. Also Eric Margolis, "Lies Drive the Afghan War," *Huffington Post* (October 16, 2009) at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-margolis/lies-drive-the-afghan-war_b_324194.html

9. A superb analysis of many of these is made in William R. Polk, "Elements of a U.S. Strategy toward Afghanistan," *The Atlantic* (September 2, 2010) at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/09/elements-of-a-us-strategy-toward-afghanistan/62436/>

10. Elizabeth A. Kennedy, "WikiLeaks: Bribery, Graft Rampant in Afghanistan," *Associated Press* (December 3, 2010) at http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101203/ap_on_re_as/as_wikileaks_afghanistan and Scott Share, Mark Mazetti and Dexter Filkins, "Cables Describe Scale of Afghan Corruption as Overwhelming," *New York Times* (December 3, 2010).

11. Susanne Koelbl, "U.S. Funds Used to Buy Villas for wealthy Afghans," *ABC News* (July 6, 2010) at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/us-funds-buy-villas-rich-afghans/story?id=11093986>, also Richard Spencer, James Kirkup and Damien McElroy, "The Karzai Empire, Villas in Dubai and Fears over Afghan Aid," *The Daily Telegraph* (September 10, 2010) at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/dubai/7994754/The-Karzai-empire-villas-in-Dubai-and-fears-over-Afghan-aid.html>

12. Robert Dreyfuss, "Afghan Farce: 'Taliban' Talker was Phony" at <http://www.uruknet.net/?p=m72099&hd=&size=1&l=e> and Dan Froomkin, "Massive U.S. Spending on 'Rule of Law' in Afghanistan not Paying Off," *Washington Post* (November 23, 2010) at <http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/E3045C51F2038BAA872577E4005BECD?OpenDocument>

13. These last two indicators are taken from Nick Turse, "How Much 'Success' Can Afghans Stand?" *Tomdispatch.com* (Sept-

are "in" again and the U.S. military is even brazenly bragging about them⁶. 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 it⁷.

I shall address neither the fallacies put out by Bush/Obama to justify the Afghan war⁸ nor a host of issues analyzed by others which I take as givens providing the context for the raging war⁹. 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.¹⁰;
- Numerous national-level Afghan politicians 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 Afghans¹¹;
- 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 drain¹²;
- 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;
- vapid 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;



ember 13, 2010) at http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175293/tomgram%3A_nick_turse_afghanistan_on_life_support_/

14. See my "An Excess of Corruption and a Deficit of Toilets: American and Karzai's 'Successes' in Afghanistan," *RAWA News* (September 28, 2010) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/09/28/an-excess-of-corruption-and-a-deficit-of-toilets-american-and-karzai-successes-in-afghanistan.phtml>

15. See Walter Mayr, "Exotic Birds in a Cage. Criticism Grows of Afghanistan's Bloated NGO Industry," *Der Spiegel Online* (September 22, 2010) at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,718656,00.html>

16. "Afghanistan is World's Largest Hashish Producer, UN Says," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (March 31, 2010 at 10.18 GMT) and Chris Hedges, "Opium, Rape and the American Way," *Truthdig* (November 2, 2009) at <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/11/02>

17. Matthew Rosenberg and Adam Entous, "Sign of War Gains Prove False," *Wall Street Journal* (November 24, 2010) at <http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/FD367F219369031C872577E50044FFCA?OpenDocument>

18. Hafuz Ahmad and Amir Khil, "Commentary: Afghans Disillusioned by Electoral Politics," Institute for War & Peace Reporting (July 22, 2010) and Malalai Joya, "Why Afghans Have No Hope in This Week's Elections," *CommonDreams.org* (August 18, 2009) at <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/08/18-10>

19. Jonathan S. Landay, "Factory, Coal Mine Show Connections Matter Most in Afghan Business," *McClatchy Newspapers* (November 14, 2010) at <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/11/14/v-print/103393/afghan-business-model-connections.html>. See also Patrick Cockburn, "Kabul's New Elite Live High on Western largesse; 'Gilded Cage' Lifestyle Reveals the Ugly Truth about Foreign Aid in Afghanistan," *The Independent* (May 1, 2009) at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/kabuls-new-elite-live-high-on-west-largesse-1677116.html>

- 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.S¹⁹;
- 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 nations²⁰;
- 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 Police²¹ which is thoroughly infiltrated by the Taliban and much of the Afghan National Army²² (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 now Afghan police and army commit crimes such as child abuse, torture and killings with impunity²³;
- U.S and NATO forces rely upon local war lords' private militias to provide security²⁴;
- 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 Quisling in Kabul);
- and trying to establish a strong, central government in Afghanistan which is a fool's errand²⁵.

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.

independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/kabuls-new-elite-live-high-on-west-largesse-1677116.html

20. Abdul Qadir Siddique, "Gender Inequality Worst in Afghanistan: UN," *Pajhwok Afghan News* (April 11, 2010) and Christina Lamb, "The Defiant Poets' Society," *The Sunday Times* (April 26, 2009) at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6149248.ece>

21. See Andreas Ulrich and Alfred Weinzierl, "Illiterate, Corrupt and Trigger-Happy. German Trainers Describe Pitiful State of Afghan Police," *Der Spiegel* (April 7, 2010) at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,687416,00.html>

22. Ann Jones, "There's Virtually Zero Percent Chance of There Ever Being a Real Afghan Army - So what's the Pentagon Thinking About?" *Alternet* (September 21, 2009) at http://www.alternet.org/world/142775/there_s_virtually_zero_percent_chance_of_there_ever_being_a_real_afghan_

army_-_so_what_s_the_pentagon_talking_about

23. "Afghan Police Committing Crimes with Impunity," *Pajhwok Afghan News* (May 10, 2011) at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2011/05/10/afghan-police-committing-crimes-impunity-oxfam>

24. Detailed in Gareth Porter, "U.S. NATO Forces Rely on Warlords for Security," *IPS-Inter Press Service* (October 29, 2009) at <http://original.antiwar.com/porter/2009/10/29/us-nato-forces-rely-on-afghan-warlords-for-security/>

25. as cogently argued by Melvin A. Goodwin who spent 42 years with the CIA, the National War College, and the U.S. Army, in his "WPost Misleads on Afghan History," *Consortiumnews.com* (October 28, 2009) at <http://www.consortiumnews.com/2009/102809a.html> and "Five Myths on Afghanistan," *Truthout.org* (October 8, 2009) at <http://www.truth-out.org/10080910>



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/~mwhherold/Anotherweddingpartymassacre_July62008.html

27. Details in Gareth Porter, "How McChrystal and Petraeus Built an Indiscriminate 'Killing Machine,'" *IPS News* (September 26, 2011) at <http://www.truth-out.org/how-mcchrystal-and-petraeus-built-indiscriminate-killing-machine/1317052524>

28. Greg Jaffe, "U.S. Commanders Told to Shift Focus to More Populated Areas," *Washington Post* (September 22, 2009) at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092103704.html>

29. "The Runaway General," *Rolling Stone* (June 22, 2010)

30. Luke Cohen, Joseph H. Felter, Radha K. Iyengar and Jacob Shapiro, "The Effect of Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq" (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper Series No. 16152, July 2010), 70 pp. at http://operationspaix.net/IMG/pdf/NBER_civilian_casualties_in_afghanistan_and_iraq_2010-07-26_.pdf

31. Graeme Smith, "Report Slams Tactic of Night Raids on Afghan Homes," *The Globe & Mail* (December 28, 2008) at <http://kaydka.com/Affart.aspx?id=1826&co=5&tr=193>

32. See Abdullah Obaidi, "Afghan Fury at Koran Burning Claims," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting* (October 27, 2009) at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KJ28Df01.html

33. Chris Floyd, "An Unaccustomed Truth: American Commander Admits Afghan Atrocities," *chris-floyd.com* (March 27, 2010) at <http://www.chris-floyd.com/component/content/article/1-latest-news/1949-an-unaccustomed-truth-american-commander-admits-afghan-atrocities.html>

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, 2008²⁶

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:

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

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 forces³⁰.

But it goes way beyond mere wounding and killing. The resistance is strengthened by the knocking down doors of a home at midnight³¹, entering homes, pulling Afghan women by 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.



34. Jerome Starkey, "NATO's Voice is Stifled as Propaganda Newspaper Ends Up as Food Wrapping," *Times Online* (November 12, 2009) at <http://www.comebackalive.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=46249&start=0#p460039>

35. see my "The Politics of Counting Dead Afghan Civilians: Responses by the Libertarian Right and Obama Liberals to McChrystal's Numbers," *RAWA News* (April 21, 2010) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/04/21/the-politics-of-counting-dead-afghan-civilians.html>

36. in my "Counting the Dead Attempts to hide the number of Afghan civilians killed by US bombs are an affront to justice," *The Guardian* (August 8, 2002) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/08/afghanistan.comment>

37. Aldo A. Benini and Lawrence H. Moulton, "Civilian Victims in an Asymmetrical Conflict. Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, 4 (2004): 403-422. The Benini & Moulton study calculates civilian deaths from bombing, landmines, unexploded ordnance strikes, from non-Western ground forces and should hence significantly exceed a count focused upon deaths directly caused by U.S. aerial bombing or ground attacks. The Benini & Moulton study based upon canvassing 600 communities covers September 12, 2001 – June 20, 2002, whereas Herold covers October 7, 2001 – July 31, 2002. Field staff visited all 600 communities directly affected by fighting (both airstrikes and ground combat).

38. A summary of the UNAMA data made be found at "Afghanistan Civilian Casualties: Year by Year, Month by Month," *The Guardian* (August 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/aug/10/afghanistan-civilian-casualties-statistics>

39. See my "One Month of the Obama Killing Machine in Afghanistan: Data and a Lesson for the UNAMA and Its

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.

Year	Low count	High count	Mid-point
Air war Oct 7 - Dec 9, 2001	2,569	2,949	2,759
Dec 10- 31st	116	116	116
Injured who later died, Oct-Dec 2001	640	796	718
2002	180	180	180
2003	64	64	64
2004	59	59	59
2005	59	71	65
2006	660	782	721
2007	1,010	1,297	1,154
2008	864	1,017	941
2009	926	1,077	1,002
2010	801	904	853
Cumulative	7,948	9,312	8,632

Table 1. Afghan Civilians Killed by Direct US/NATO Actions (impact deaths)

Note: the data omits most victims of the U.S drone strikes in the border region with Pakistan numbering close to 1,000 deaths.

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 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



Groupies," *RAWA News* (March 10, 2010) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/03/10/one-month-of-the-obama-killing-machine-in-afghanistan-data-and-a-lesson-for-the-una-ma-and-its-groupies.phtml>

40. In its *Troops in Contact. Airstrikes and Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008) at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/09/08/troops-contact-0>

41. See my "The Pentagon's Fantasy Numbers on Afghan Civilian Deaths," *Global Research* (April 18, 2010) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18718>

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. Deb Reichmann, "Coalition Ramps up Air War over Afghanistan," *Associated Press* (November 30, 2010) at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/30/AR2010113002746.html>

44. Luke Cohen, Joseph H. Felter, Radha K. Iyengar and Jacob Shapiro, op.cit.

45. Spencer Ackerman, "Commandos Hold Afghan Detainees in Secret Jails," *Wired.com* (April 8, 2011) at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/04/commandos-hold-afghan-detainees-in-secret-jails/>

46. Karen DeYoung and Greg Jaffe, "U.S. 'Secret War' Expands Globally as Special Operations Forces Take Larger Role," *Washington Post* (June 4, 2010). See also Tom Eley, "Killings of Civilians in Afghanistan: US Special Forces Covered Up Massacre," *Global Research* (April 8, 2010) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18554>

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

by NATO actions during 2008-2010, but the figures are not credible.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 2010⁴². 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*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 2010.⁴⁴ 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.

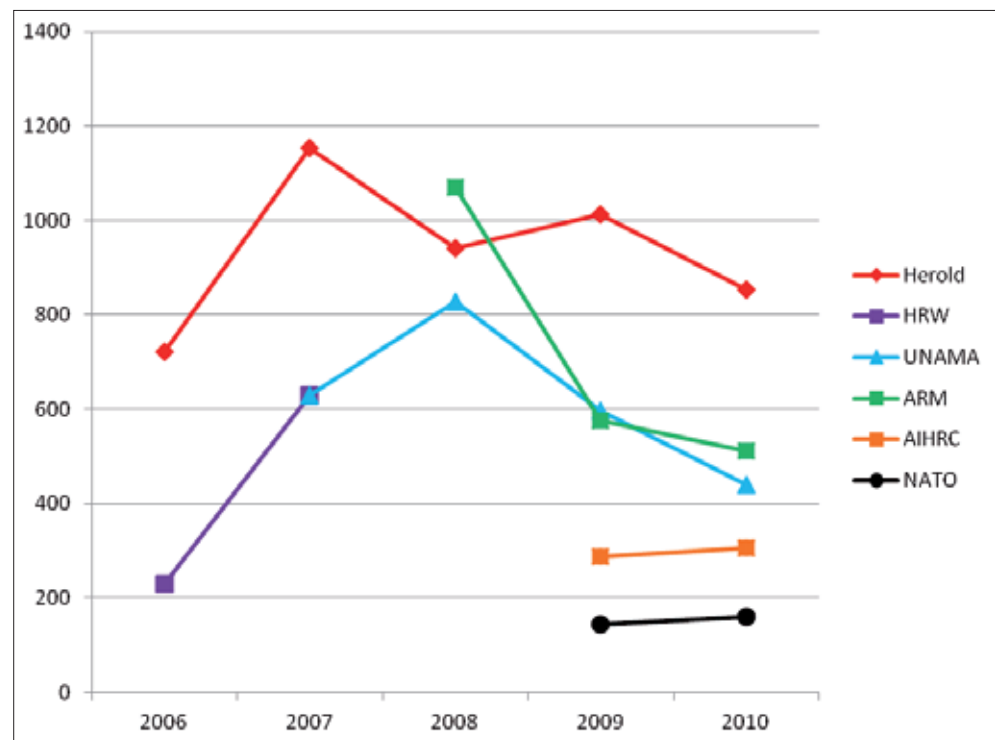
Table 2. Various Counts of Afghan Civilian Casualties, 2006 - 2010

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.

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

**for first 7 months in Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, "Civilian Casualty Figure: First Seven Months of 2010" (Kabul: AIHRC, August 8, 2010) at http://www.aihrc.org.af/2010_eng/Eng_pages/Reports/Thematic/Civilian_Casualties_Jan_Jul31_2010.pdf

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





Afghanistan – and the NYT Should Know That,” *History News Network* (September 7, 2009) at <http://hnn.us/articles/116462.html> and especially Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (New York: William Morrow, 1990).

48. Nick Davies, “Afghanistan War Logs: Task Force 373 – Special Forces Hunting Top Taliban,” *The Guardian* (July 25, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/25/task-force-373-secret-afghanistan-taliban>

49. Davies, *op. cit.*

50. Liliانا Segura, “As U.S. Admits Killing and Covering up Pregnant Afghan Women’s Murder, Karzai Goes Rogue,” *Alternet* (April 5, 2010) at <http://www.pdamerica.org/articles/news/2010-04-06-09-25-25-news.php>

51. Jerome Starkey, “US Special Forces ‘Tried to Cover-up’ Botched Khataba Raid in Afghanistan,” *The Times* (April 5, 2010) at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/afghanistan/article7087637.ece>

52. Read more: <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2009/04/12/americaand-8217-s-afghan-war-the-real-world-versus-obamaand-8217-s-marketed-imagery.html#ixzz15jNxlSi>

53. at http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold/ob_AbrotherofJannatGul_april82009.html

54. For example, expressed in Chris Sands, “War-Wearied People Fear Little Hope for Peace,” *The National* (March 9, 2009) at <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090309/FOREIGN/614496422/1002>, Kathy Gannon, “Afghans Fed up with Government, U.S.,” *Associated Press* (September 5, 2008) at <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2008/09/07-3> and Abdus Sattar Ghazali, “Obama Embraces Bush’s War on Terror Policy Without Naming It So,” *OpEdNews* (February 25, 2009) at http://www.amperspective.com/html/obama_embraces_.html

55. Based upon counterinsurgency theory which calls for a ratio of troops to inhabitants

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.⁴⁵ 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 Force units in the infamous Project Phoenix mimic the CIA-trained Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) employed in Vietnam which murdered from 20-40,000 Vietnamese civilians⁴⁷. 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 Afghanistan 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 position⁵⁴. An additional 30,000 U.S troops – the Obama surge – means nothing in a country where military experts estimate that ~500,000 foreign soldiers



of 1:50. As mentioned in Paul Daley, "Taliban Thwart Bid to Rebuild," *Sydney Morning Herald* (February 1, 2009) at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/taliban-thwart-bid-to-reb/2009/01/31/1232818793464.html>, Tom Andrews, "Classified McChrystal Report: 500,000 Troops will be Required over Five Years in Afghanistan," *Huffington Post* (September 24, 2009) at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-andrews/classified-mcchrystal-rep_b_298528.html?view=print and in Steve Weissman, "500,000 Troops for Pashtunistan?" *Truthout.org* (October 6, 2009) at <http://www.truthout.org/1006091>

56. The Russian case was superbly summarized by Victor Sebestyen, "Transcripts of Defeat," *New York Times* (October 28, 2009) at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/29/opinion/29sebestyen.html>

57. Rodric Braithwaite, "The Familiar Road to Failure in Afghanistan," *Financial Times* (December 22, 2009) at <http://gonzalaraffoinfonews.blogspot.com/2009/12/familiar-road-to-failure-in-afghanistan.html>

58. Gareth Porter, "McChrystal Looks to Spin Afghan Civilian Deaths Problem," *Antiwar.com* (June 17, 2009) at <http://original.antiwar.com/porter/2009/06/17/mcchrystal-looks-to-spin-afghan-civilian-deaths-problem/>

59. Derived in my "Matrix of Death. A new dossier on the (im)precision of U.S. bombing and the (undervaluation of Afghan lives," *Frontline India's National Magazine* 25, 21 (October 11-24, 2008): 21 at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2521/stories/20081024252100400.htm> and in "Obama's Afghan War: The New Metric of Civilian Casualties," *Global Research* (June 12, 2009) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=13957>

60. Source: <http://www.icasualties.org/OEF/ByMonth.aspx>

61. Details in my "Matrix of Death. A New Dossier on the (Im)Precision of U.S. Bombing

would be necessary to quell the resistance⁵⁵. 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 territory⁵⁶. As Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former ambassador to the USSR, put it, both *invaders had tactics without strategy*⁵⁷.

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 public⁵⁸ 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*⁵⁹. 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). *U.S occupation troop deaths* from hostile action have soared since 2007: 2007, 83; 2008, 133; 2009, 268 and in 2010, 440⁶⁰.

Table 3. Monthly Fatalities of Afghan Civilians (killed by US/NATO) Action and of Foreign Occupation Troops' Hostile Fatalities Involved in Operation Enduring Freedom, October 2008 – December 2010

Sources: Afghan civilians from my Afghan Victim Memorial Project data base and foreign occupation troop fatalities from ICasualties.org at <http://www.icasualties.org/oef/>

	(1) Afghan Civilian Deaths	(2) US/NATO troop deaths	Ratio of (1)/(2)
October 2008	91-97	18	5.1-5.4
November 2008	95-138	12	7.9-11.5
December 2008	41	26	1.6
January 2009	112-120	21	5.3-5.7
February 2009	50	24	2.1
March 2009	36	25	1.4
April 2009	77-82	10	6.4-8.2
May 2009	147-220	23	6.4-9.6
June 2009	109-133	33	3.3-4.0
July 2009	47-56	65	0.7-0.9
August 2009	64-66	72	0.9-1.1
September 2009	99-118	61	1.6-1.9
October 2009	62-69	61	1.0-1.1
November 2009	66	29	2.3
December 2009	57-61	32	1.8-1.9
January 2010	72	39	1.8
February 2010	82-88	50	1.6-1.8
March 2010	28-39	35	0.8-1.1
April 2010	30-35	28	1.1-1.3
May 2010	40-47	47	0.9-1.0
June 2010	68-98	84	0.8-1.2
July 2010	55-61	75	0.7-0.8
August 2010	82-89	75	1.1-1.2
September 2010	78-86	46	1.7-1.9
October 2010	149-165	63	2.4-2.6
November 2010	54-61	51	1.1-1.2
December 2010	63-65	39	1.6-1.7



and the (Under)valuation of Afghan Lives," *Frontline. India's National Magazine* 25, 21 (October 11-24, 2008): cover and pp. 4-23. Also published in Canada's *Global Research* at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10506>

62. Sebastian Abbot, "Villagers Claim Deaths, Complicating Afghan Push," *Associated Press News* (November 26, 2010) at http://www.seattlepi.com/national/1104ap_as_afghan_propaganda_war.html

63. well explored in Fred Branfman, "Petraeus Must Go: Mass Assassination of Muslims Threatens Us All," *Huffington Post* (August 24, 2010) at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/fred-branfman/petraeus-must-go-mass-ass_b_692277.html

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

65. "NATO Says Night Raids to Continue Despite Afghan Objections," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (December 6, 2010) at http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/southasia/news/article_1603683.php/NATO-says-night-raids-to-continue-despite-Afghan-objections

66. Tony Iltis, "The Rise of the Killer Machines," *Green Left Weekly* (December 5, 2010) at <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/46341>

67. Figures reported in Bill Van Auken, "US Escalates Killing on Both Sides of Afghanistan-Pakistan Border," *wsws.org* (September 29, 2010) at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/sep2010/pers-s29.shtml>

68. A rare case study of such a drone strike which killed 12-23 Afghan civilians in Daikundi province on February 21, 2010 is provided in David S. Cloud, "Predator Drones: High-tech Tools and Human Errors," *Los Angeles Times* (April 10, 2011) at <http://>

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 2006⁶¹. 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 deaths⁶².

Petraeus 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 doubled⁶⁴. Night raids by U.S. Special Operations' forces have risen now to about 200 a month, a five-fold rise since 2009⁶⁵. In 2010, the rate of drone strikes in Pakistan rose seven-fold over 2009⁶⁶. 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 strikes⁶⁷. Countless civilians are slaughtered because drone operators in Nevada and Florida often cannot distinguish clearly between "insurgents" and civilians⁶⁸. If drones now even kill U.S. Marines, one can only wonder about the carnage perpetrated upon Afghan and Pashtun civilians⁶⁹. Drone strikes' remain shrouded in official secrecy⁷⁰. U.S. counterinsurgency experts, David Kilcullen and Andrew Exum also cite the 700 figure⁷¹. 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 Exum⁷², by the standards of international law, drone warfare is illegal⁷³.

Obama stated that US/NATO forces in Afghanistan were *wagers of peace*⁷⁴. America's propaganda ministers and generals cover-up that the Taliban & Co. are *winning in Afghanistan*⁷⁵. 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 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



www.latimes.com/news/nation-world/world/la-fg-afghanistan-drone-20110410,0,201182.story

69. Ewen MacAskill, "Two US Soldiers Killed in Friendly-Fire Drone Attack in Afghanistan," *The Guardian* (April 11, 2011) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/11/us-soldiers-killed-in-drone-attack>

70. Gareth Porter, "CIA Secrecy on Drone Attacks Data Hides Abuses," *IPSNews* (June 12, 2009) at <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47196>

71. Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "Pakistan Drone War Takes a Toll on Militants – and Civilians," *cnn.com* (October 29, 2009) at http://articles.cnn.com/2009-10-29/opinion/bergen.drone.war_1_drone-attacks-drone-strikes-long-war-journal?_s=PM:OPINION

72. as argued by the founder and president of the future of freedom Foundation, Jacob G. Hornberger, "Drone Assassinations Are Only Making Things Worse," *Future of Freedom Foundation* (October 22, 2009) at <http://www.fff.org/blog/jgh-blog/2009-10-22.asp>. Kilcullen and Exum are two counterinsurgency "experts" in the U.S., see their "Death from Above, Outrage down Below," *New York Times* (May 17, 2009) at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/opinion/17exum.html>

73. See Max Kantar, "International Law: The First Casualty of the Drone War," *ZNet* (December 12, 2009) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=16539>

74. See the excellent essay on how truth is a lie, war is peace, etc. by Justin Raimundo, "The Afghan 'Experiment,'" *Antiwar.com* (December 10, 2009) at <http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2009/12/10/the-afghan-experiment/>

75. in the words British scholar and historian, William Dalrymple in his "Why the Taliban is Winning in Afghanistan," *The New Statesman* (June 29, 2010) at <http://www.newstatesman.com/international-politics/2010/06/british-afghanistan-government>

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 ..."⁷⁶.

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 lost⁷⁷.

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 *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 groups⁷⁸. Faced with superior force, the resistance simply melts away and then returns when the foreign occupation forces withdraw⁷⁹.

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 time). Fourth, William Polk argues that the U.S./NATO display a profound misunderstanding of Afghan socio-political realities⁸⁰ which plays into Taliban hands. Polk points to the unique Afghan style of governance, the Afghan understanding of foreign civic action programs (whether Soviet or American), and Afghans' virulent 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 2009⁸⁴. 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)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")⁸⁶. By late 2008, Taliban IEDs were already effective at disabling America's new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles⁸⁷.

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 2007.⁸⁸ 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 night⁸⁹. 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"⁹⁰. A recent report by aid agencies working in Afghanistan also emphasizes growing insecurity and soaring civilian casualties⁹¹. 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-Ahad⁹².

76. Emphasis added by M.H. Neil Faulkner, "Guerrilla of Arabia: How One of Britain's Most Brilliant Military Tacticians Created the Taliban's Battle Strategy," *The Independent* (September 17, 2010) at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/guerrilla-of-arabia-how-one-of-britains-most-brilliant-military-tacticians-created-the-talibans-battle-strategy-2081555.html>.

77. Edward Girardet, "Afghanistan War: Lessons from the Soviet War," *Christian Science Monitor* (March 18, 2010) at <http://www.veteranstop.com/2010/03/19/edward-girardet-afghanistan-war-lessons-from-the-soviet-war/>. See also Robert Fisk, "This Strategy has been Tried Before – Without Success," *The Independent* (December 3, 2009) at <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-this-strategy-has-been-tried-before-ndash-without-success-1833133.html>

78. Derrick Crowe, "Security in Afghanistan Crumbles as Counterinsurgency Fails," *Huffington Post* (September 13, 2010) at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/derrick-crowe/security-in-afghanistan-c_b_714120.html

79. Numerous cases exist, for example Sayed Salahuddin and Peter Graff, "Taliban Say Control Area after Battle with U.S.," *Reuters* (October 7, 2009) at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSP402619>

80. William R. Polk, "Legitimation Crisis in Afghanistan," *The Nation* (April 1, 2010) at <http://www.thenation.com/article/legitimation-crisis-afghanistan>

81. From the Spanish daily, *El País* (July 4, 2009) at http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/Estamos/librando/combatos/infemales/elpepuint/20090704elpepuint_1/Tes. See also Miles Amore, "Taliban Bring Order, Say Afghans," *The Australian* (December 14, 2009) at <http://www.uruknet.info/?new=61027> and Griff Witte, "Taliban Shadow Officials Offer Concrete Alternative," *Washington Post* (December 8, 2009) at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/07/AR2009120704127.html>

82. Gilles Dorransoro, "Proposal for More Soldiers Ignores Key Realities in Afghanistan," *Oregonlive.com* (October 24, 2009) http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/10/proposal_for_more_soldiers_ign.html. This view is widely confirmed elsewhere as in Peter Graff, "Afghans Turn to Taliban in Fear of Own Police," *Reuters* (July 12, 2008) at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE56B0X520090712> and in Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Face to Face with the Taliban" *The People are Fed up with the Government*, *The Guardian* (August 18, 2009) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/18/taliban-committee-kunduz-afghanistan>

83. Patrick Cockburn, "History is Repeating Itself in Afghanistan," *The Independent* (December 18, 2010) at <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/patrick-cockburn-history-is-repeating-itself-in-afghanistan-2163641.html>

84. Noah Schachtman, "Open Source Tools Turn WikiLeaks into Illustrated Afghan Meltdown," *Wired.com* (August 9, 2010) at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/?p=29209>

85. Jim Michaels, "Afghanistan Airdrops Increase as Supply Risks Rise," *USA Today* (December 12, 2008) at http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-12-11-airdrop_N.htm

86. "Afghan Violence Soars, Insurgency Expanding: U.S.," *Reuters* (November 23, 2010) at http://www.reuters.com/article/STRE6AM5WB20101123?loomia_ow=t0:s0:a49:g43:r1:c0.500000:b39767470:z0. Details on the increased sophistication of the Taliban are provided in Roy Gutman, "Afghanistan's Taliban Have Evolved over the Years," *McClatchy Newspapers* (April 10, 2010) at <http://www.sananews.net/english/2010/04/11/afghanistan%E2%80%99s-taliban-have-evolved-over-the-years/>

87. See Jonathan S. Landay, "Afghan Insurgents Learn to Destroy Key U.S. Armored Vehicle," *McClatchy Newspapers* (November 5, 2009) at <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2009/11/05/78443/afghan-insurgents-learn-to-destroy.html> and Anna Mulrine, "Resistance Deploys New Super-Bombs: U.S. Military MRAPs Easy to Destroy," *U.S. News* (October 31, 2008) at <http://politics.usnews.com/news/iraq/articles/2008/10/31/talibans-new-super-bombs-threaten-us-troops-even-in-pricey-mraps.html>

88. Jon Hemming, "Taliban in 72 Percent of Afghanistan, Think-Tank Says," *Reuters* (December 8, 2008) at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE4B70YB20081208>

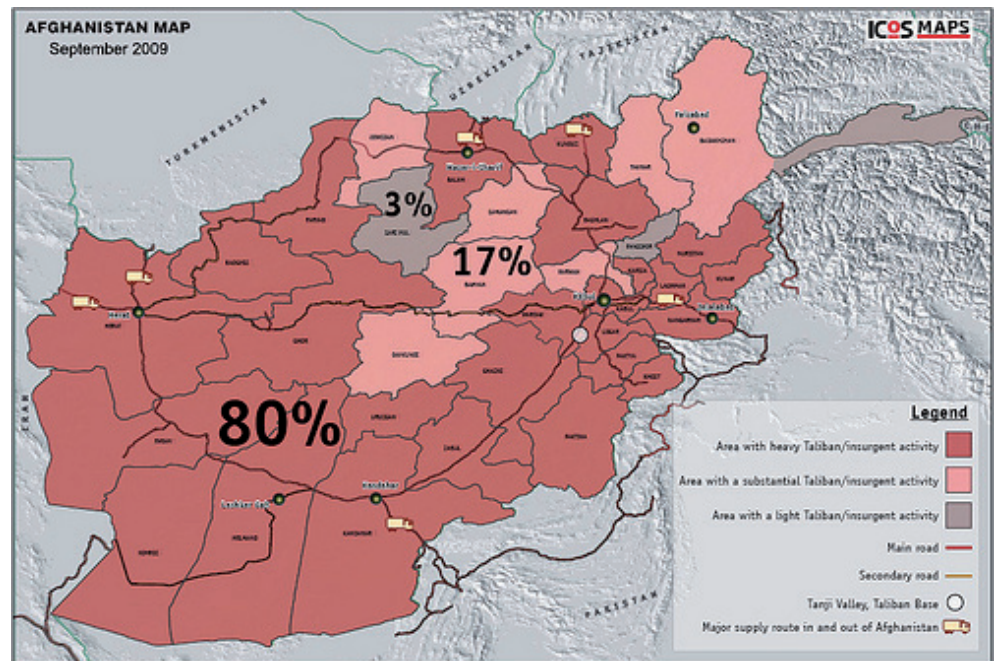
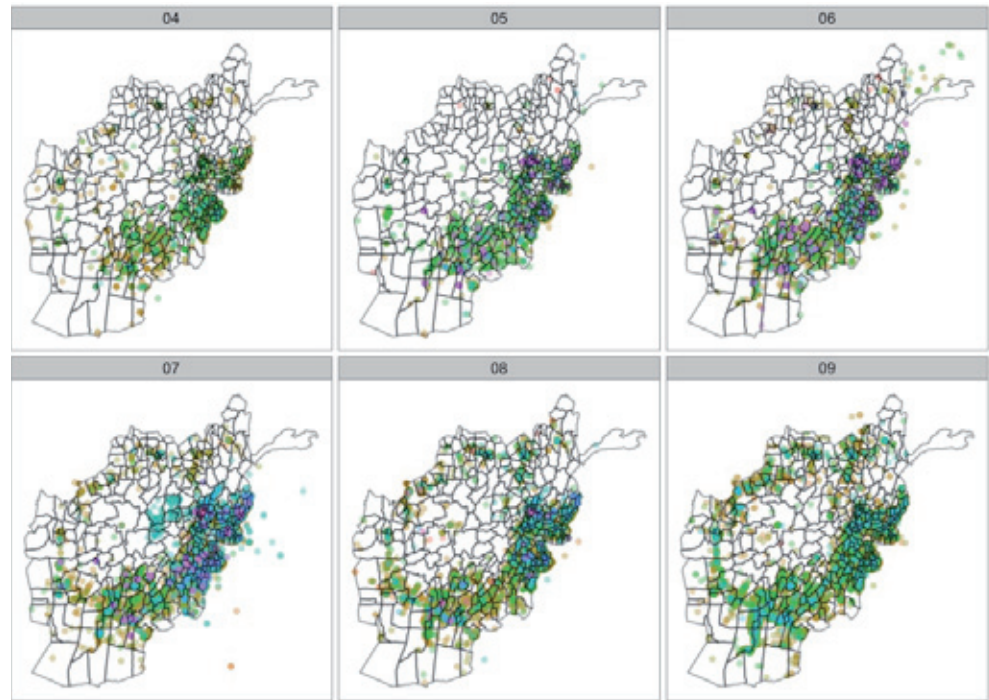
89. James Ferguson, "Taliban Commander: There are no al-Qaeda Fighters in Afghanistan," *The Independent* (November 15, 2010) at <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/taliban-commander-there-are-no-alqaida-fighters-in-afghanistan-15004202.html?service=Print>

90. Journalist recounts his experiences with Taliban in Afghanistan," *pbs.org* (October 14, 2008) at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/asia/afghanistan/july-dec08/rosen_10-14.html

91. "Civilian Casualties Soaring in Afghanistan," *The Daily Telegraph* (November 18, 2010)

92. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "The Taliban Troop with an East London Cab Driver," *The Guardian* (November 24, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/24/the-taliban-troop-london-jihadists> and "Five Days inside a Taliban Jail," *The Guardian* (November 25, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/25/taliban-afghanistan-prison-special-report> and "Talking to the Taliban about Life after Occupation," *The Guardian* (November 26, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/26/taliban-afghanistan-occupation>

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93. cited in Thom Shanke, "Top U.S. Commander Sees Progress in Afghanistan," *New York Times* (February 5, 2010) at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/05/world/asia/05gates.html>

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/~mwherald/>

95. "Pentagon Spending Billions on PR to Sway World Opinion," *Associated Press* (February 5, 2009) at <http://www.infowars.com/pentagon-spending-billions-on-pr-to-sway-world-opinion/>, Glenn Greenwald, "War Propaganda from Afghanistan," *Salon.com* (April 27, 2010) at http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/04/27/afghanistan. For a case study of Pentagon propaganda in action, see Gareth Porter, "Fiction of Marja was U.S. Information War," *ipsnews.net* (March 8, 2010) at <http://ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=50581>

96. Discussed for example in Matthew Nasuti, "America's Happy War in Afghanistan: American Government Sugar-Coating Afghan War News for Sweet-Toothed U.S. Media," *The Atlantic Free Press* (December 25, 2009) at <http://www.atlanticfreepress.com/news/1/12512-americas-happy-war-in-afghanistan-american-government-sugar-coating-afghan-war-news-for-sweet-toothed-us-media.html>

97. Glenn Greenwald, "The Joys of 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.

Obama/Pentagon Efforts at Controlling the Narrative of America's Afghan War

"This is all a war of perceptions" – General Stanley McChrystal⁹³

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 spent 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 spokespersons⁹⁷. 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 positive⁹⁹. 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 Azizabad 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: an 80-yr old, a 70-yr old, a 30-yr old, a 20-yr old and an 18-yr old, leaving the family without any males¹⁰¹. The Jaldak elders maintain the innocence of the dead and three detained, to the point that they refused to bury the bodies and threatened to display them on Highway 1. At the time, the U.S. military issued a news report mentioning that it had killed "five insurgents in a raid in the restive south" in Zabul Province. The report noted that "having moved the women and children to safety, the force entered the buildings, killing five armed militants" as relayed by the *Agence France-Presse* in a wire report of January 9, 2009¹⁰². A search of Lexis-Nexis reveals one other mention of the Zabul operation. *Xinhua General News Service* quoted local officials in Zabul who stated that five civilians from one family were killed in a raid by international forces in the wee-hours of Friday¹⁰³. Countless similar examples are presented in my Afghan Victim Memorial Project data base. Wikileaks' liberated war logs document many cases of how the U.S. military sanitized records of bloodbaths¹⁰⁴.



raid during August 2010 was published, see <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/22/al-jazeera-reports-arrest-of-cameramen/>

98. Rachel Coen, "Propaganda or Patriotism? The Media, the Military and the ICTY," *FAIR.org* (Sept/Oct 2000) at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1045> and Matt Wells, "Al-Jazeera Accuses US of Bombing its Kabul Office," *The Guardian* (November 17, 2001) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2001/nov/17/warinafghanistan2001.afghanistan>

99. Charlie reed, Kevin Baron and Leo Shanelli, "Files Prove Pentagon is Profiling Reporters," *Stars & Stripes* (August 27, 2009) at <http://www.stripes.com/news/files-prove-pentagon-is-profiling-reporters-1.94248>

100. Ann Scott Tyson, "Pentagon Reports U.S. Airstrike Killed 5 Afghan Civilians, not 90," *Washington Post* (August 29, 2008) at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/28/AR2008082802203.html>

101. "WikiLeaks Cables: Afghan Elders Threaten to Display Victims' Bodies," *The Guardian* (December 3, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/187761/print>

102. "US Force Kills Five Insurgents in Afghanistan," *Agence France-Presse* (January 9, 1009 6:57 AM GMT)

103. "3 NATO Troops, 5 Civilians Killed in S. Afghanistan Violence," *Xinhua General News Service* (January 9, 2009 4:24 PM EST) at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/09/content_10631130.htm

104. Declan Walsh, "Afghanistan War Logs: US Marines Sanitised Record of Bloodbath," *The Guardian* (July 26, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/26/afghanistan-war-logs-us-marines/print>

105. As stated in a RAND study prepared for the U.S. Air Force by Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War. Press and Public Reactions to Civilian*

Contrary to U.S. military thinking which asserts that "the press heavily reports on civilian casualty incidents... civilian casualty incidents are highly 'mediagenic',"¹⁰⁵ 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 point¹⁰⁶. 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 province¹⁰⁷.

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 dastardly 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 wars¹⁰⁸.

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 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"¹⁰⁹.

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



Deaths in Wartime (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2006): xx.

106. See Laura King "Afghan Civilian Deaths Decline under New U.S. Tactics," *Los Angeles Times* (August 28, 2009). The topic is examined in Marc W. Herold "Truth about Afghan Civilian Casualties Comes only through American Lenses for the U.S. Corporate Media (Our Modern-Fay Didymus)," in Peter Phillips & Project Censored (eds), *Censored 2003, The Top 25 Censored Stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002): 265-294.

107. see "Bush, Obama and the Corporate Media: Eight Years of Immaculate Deception about America's Afghan War," *RAWA News* (March 28, 2010) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/03/28/bush-obama-and-the-corporate-media-eight-years-of-immaculate-deception-about-america-afghan-war.phtml>. Christopher Dowd has done the same for a slaughter that took place on May 4, 2010, see "The Ever Changing Story: Anatomy of a Typical Military Propaganda Campaign," *Boston Libertarian Examiner* (June 4, 2009) at <http://www.examiner.com/libertarian-in-boston/the-ever-changing-story-anatomy-of-a-typical-us-military-propaganda-campaign>

108. See Edward S. Herman, "Tragic Errors' in U.S. Military Policy. Targeting the Civilian Population," *Z Magazine* 15, 8 (September 2002) at http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/War_Peace/Tragic_Errors_Military.html

109. Edward S. Herman, "Tragic Errors' in U.S. Military Policy. Targeting the Civilian Population," *Z Magazine* 15, 8 (September 2002) at <http://www.zmag.org/ZMag/articles/sep02herman.html>

110. Dahr Jamail and Tom Engelhardt, "An Increasingly Aerial Occupation," *Antiwar.com* (December 14, 2005) at <http://www.antiwar.com/engelhardt/?articleid=8255>

Afghanistan"¹¹⁰. The compliant mainstream media perpetuates the myth by serving as stenographer of the Pentagon's virtual reality. When details of Afghan civilian deaths do leak through the US/NATO news management efforts, a Lt. Colonel at Bagram offers "sincere regrets" or the promise of an investigation and by tomorrow all is forgotten. They are, after all, just Afghans "we" killed. Theirs are bad bodies, not good bodies.

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 Commission¹¹¹. 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 lies¹¹², 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 resurface weeks or months later (the multiple lives of resistance leaders¹¹³;
- Announcing with great fanfare the capture of "Taliban," who are then soon released, e.g., Petraeus' captured 'Taliban' have been over 80% civilian¹¹⁴. But this now intentional as US night raids are aimed at Afghan civilians (who are held briefly in order to extract information)¹¹⁵;
- Proclaiming victory in taking over (the fictional) city of Marjah a success then¹¹⁶ 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)¹¹⁷;
- 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



111. Ahmad Omed Khpawhak, "Taliban not Responsible for Cutting off Aisha's Nose: AIHRC," *Pajhwok Afghan News* (December 6, 2010) at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2010/12/06/taliban-not-responsible-cutting-aishas-nose-ears-aihrc>

112. See my "Newspeak of the AP Reporting on Afghanistan and Its Silence about 1,000 Afghan Civilians Killed by the US/NATO so far in 2007," *RAWA News* (December 2, 2007) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/rawanews.php?id=355>

113. Jason Dietz, "US Again Fails to Kill Pakistani Leader," *Antiwar.com* (April 28, 2010) at <http://news.antiwar.com/2010/04/28/report-hakimullah-mehsud-still-basically-ok/> and Eli Lake, "Dead Al Qaeda Terrorist Surfaces for Media," *The Washington Times* (October 15, 2009) at http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/oct/15/dead-terrorist-surfaces-for-media/?feat=home_headlines

114. Gareth Porter, "90% of Petraeus's Captured Taliban Were Civilians," *IPS News* (June 12, 2011) at <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=56038>

115. Gareth Porter, "US Night Raids Aimed at Afghan Civilians," *IPS News* (September 21, 2011) reprinted at <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2011/09/21-3>

116. Gareth Porter, "Marjah: The Non-Existent City the Military Said We Conquered in Afghanistan," *Alternet* (March 19, 2010) at <http://www.alternet.org/module/printversion/145971>

117. James Denslow, "Death of the Afghan Surge," *The Guardian* (December 17, 2010) at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/16/afghanistan-surge-obama>

118. Though only 9% of contractors were U.S. nationals while 19% were third-country nationals and 75% local nationals. Data from Major Christine M. Schverak, "The Globalization of Military Logistics," *Army Sustainment* 42, 3 (May-June 2010) at <http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/May-June10/>

highest ratio of contractors to military personnel in U.S. history¹¹⁸ and Green Card soldiers¹¹⁹), outsourcing combat to lackey nations (e.g., most recently Slovakia, Czech Republic even Mongolia¹²⁰);

- 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 routine¹²². 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 them¹²³. 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 torture¹²⁴;

- U.S. abuse of detainees has been routine at Afghanistan bases¹²⁵;

- Hiding the fact that all too many US soldiers from General "mad dog" Mattis who famously proclaimed he enjoyed killing¹²⁶ to the Stryker Brigade boys who took photos posing with dead Afghan civilians¹²⁷ to the US Army Green Beret who shot an Afghan and cut off his ear as a trophy¹²⁸, 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. Bush¹²⁹;

- 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 breathless¹³⁰. Other stellar exemplars of such toady journalists are Laura King and Jason Straszio;

- 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 negotiation¹³¹;

- Failing to note that there are now at best 50-100 Al Qaeda cadres/fighters in all of Afghanistan¹³²;

- 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

spectrum_globe_logistics.html. Other sources cite US forces in Afghanistan in December 2009 at numbering 189,000 personnel (68,000 troops and 121,000 contractors) (from Jeremy Scahill, "Stunning Statistics about the War Every American Should Know," *Alternet* (December 21, 2009) at http://www.alternet.org/world/144694/stunning_statistics_about_the_war_in_afghanistan_every_american_should_know/

119. aspiring immigrants to the United States who are granted residence status (a Green Card) in return for serving in the U.S. military

120. The case of Mongolia which contributed an infantry platoon in February 2010, is examined in Rick Rozoff, "Mongolia: The Pentagon's Trojan Horse. US-NATO Partner Wedged Between China and Russia," *Global Research* (April 8, 2010) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18423>

121. Michael M. Phillips, "Army Deploys Old Tactic in PR War," *Wall Street Journal* (June 1, 2009) at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124380078921270039.html>

122. See Andy Worthington, "The Black Hole of Bagram," *The Future of Freedom Foundation* (May 24, 2010) at <http://www.fff.org/comment/com1005i.asp>, Marc Ambinder, "Inside the Secret Interrogation Facility at Bagram," *The Atlantic* (May 14, 2010) at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/05/inside-the-secret-interrogation-facility-at-bagram/56678/>, Anand Ghopal, "Night Raids, Hidden Detention Centers, the 'Black Jail,' and the Dogs of War in Afghanistan," *Huffington Post* (January 28, 2010) at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anand-gopal/obamas-secret-prisons-nig_b_440401.html, Sara Daniel, "Bagram, Obama's Secret Penal Colony," *Le Nouvel Observateur* (February 11, 2010) at <http://www.truth-out.org/bagram-obamas-secret-penal-colony56981> and Alissa J. Rubin, "U.S. Military Said to Utilize 'Black Jails': Accounts Tell of Inmates Held Incommunicado at Base in Afghanistan," *International*

to propaganda not journalism¹³³. As expected, the *New York Times* selectively reported on WikiLeaks documents¹³⁴;

- And generally, a discourse about politics as a Debordian spectacle¹³⁵. 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 collapse¹³⁶.

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).

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: http://news.yahoo.com/nphotos/slideshow/photo//101113/ids_photos_wl/r3379912763.jpg/_ylt=Ak8_D5j0fuKDL3H.fiPuMe-QB55Z4

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: “U.S 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>

Herald Tribune (November 30, 2009) at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/world/asia/29bagram.html>, Glenn Greenwald, “Bagram: The Sham of Closing Guantanamo,” *Salon.com* (September 15, 2009) at http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2009/09/15/bagram

123. Further details in Ben Farmer, Dean Nelson, and Philip Sherwell, “Inside the Other Guantanamo: Prison camp at American Base in Afghanistan Has Twice as Many Inmates and an Even Murkier Legal Status,” *The Sunday Telegraph* (January 25, 2009)

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127. Laura L. Myers, “U.S. Medic Jailed for Firing on Unarmed Afghans,” *Reuters* (December 1, 2010) at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE-6B10MS20101202>

128. Estes Thompson, “Green Beret: Leader Shot, Mutilated Afghan Man,” *USA Today* (August 12, 2008) at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-08-12-green-beret_N.htm

129. Details in Sheldon Richman, “Obama’s Betrayals,” *The Future of Freedom* (May 22, 2009) at <http://www.fff.org/comment/>





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130. Kelley B. Vlahos, "Lara Logan Casts Her Spell for War," *Antiwar.com* (October 13, 2009) at <http://original.antiwar.com/vlahos/2009/10/12/lara-logan-casts-her-spell-for-war/>, Glen Greenwald, "The Two Poles of Journalism" *Salon.com* (January 28, 2010) at <http://mobile.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2010/06/28/journalism/index.html> in which Greenwald contrasts the independent journalism of Michael Hastings and the journalism serving the powerful of Lara Logan and also see <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch?id=6902810n>

131. Gutman, op. cit.

132. Kevin Drum, "How Dangerous is Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan," *Mother Jones* (July 6, 2010) at <http://motherjones.com/print/67877>

133. Examined in FAIR, "WikiLeaks and the U.S. Press. Media Resistance to Exposure of Government Secrets" (Washington D.C.: Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, August 3, 2010) at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=4128>

134. Stephen Lendman, "The New York Times Again Censoring WikiLeaks," *Baltimore Chronicle* (November 30, 2010) at <http://baltimorechronicle.com/2010/113010Lendman.html>

135. Chris Hedges, "The Phantom Left," *Countercurrents.org* (November 2, 2010) at <http://www.countercurrents.org/hedges021110.htm>

136. Chris Floyd, "Starved of Truth: The Assonance of Atrocity in the Afghan War 'Review,'" *Empire Burlesque* (December 17, 2010) at <http://chris-floyd.com/articles/1-latest-news/2064-starved-of-truth-the-asonance-of-atrocity-in-the-afghan-war-qreviewq.html>

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 ObamaSpeak "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 Afghans fighting the Russian invader were called "freedom fighters."

The usual western 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.

Another standard mantra is the "Insurgents continue their indiscriminate killing and wounding of innocent civilians despite their leaderships guidance," said U.S. Army Col. Rafael Torres, International Security Assistance Force Joint Command Combined Joint Operations Center director. "Our thoughts and concerns are with the families during this difficult time." As Afghan civilian deaths rose, the U.S/NATO say, "...Sorry."¹⁴²

137. See my "Uncomfortable Others: Afghan Civilians Wounded by America," *RAWA News* (February 20, 2009) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/rawanews.php?id=938>

138. Michael Griffin, "Picturing America's War on Terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Journalism* 5, 4 (2004): 381-402

139. To see click on <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoid=222759&title=redefiniti-on-accomplishedv>. Further details in Peter Baker, "The Words Have Changed, but Have the Policies," *New York Times* (April 2, 2009) at <http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/4B45C0BE085482E18725758C004DE0C2?OpenDocument>

140. Jason Dietz, "US to Pump Thousands of 'Combat Enablers' into Afghanistan," *Antiwar.com* (September 15, 2009) at <http://news.antiwar.com/2009/09/15/us-to-pump-thousands-of-combat-enablers-into-afghanistan/>

141. See for example at http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20101113/wl_nm/us_afghanistan_4 by Reuters, November 13, 2010 at 4:18 AM ET.

142. Julius Cavendish, "Afghanistan War: As Civilian Deaths Rise, NATO Says, 'I'm Sorry,'" *Christian Science Monitor* (February 23, 2010) at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/0223/Afghanistan-war-As-civilian-deaths-rise-NATO-says-Sorry>



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 1839-42¹⁴³. 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 2011¹⁴⁵.

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 Right¹⁴⁶) does not (and has never) care(d) about civilians killed by US military. But for liberals, Obama can do no wrong¹⁴⁷. 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 Obama¹⁴⁸ (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 war¹⁴⁹.

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 lies¹⁵⁰, 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.

143. Dalrymple, op. cit.

144. In his “Dream of Afghan Democracy is Dead,” *Financial Times* (June 11, 2008)

145. Examined in Gareth Porter, “Slain Writer's Book Says US-NATO War Served Al-Qaeda Strategy,” *IPS News* (June 7, 2011) at <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=55964>

146. See for example, Ron Paul, “The Cycle of Violence in Afghanistan,” *LewRockwell.com* (August 10, 2010) at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/paul/paul688.html> and “Instead of Bombs and Bribes, Let's Try Empathy and Trade,” *Antiwar.com* (October 5, 2009) at <http://original.antiwar.com/paul/2009/10/05/> and David R. Henderson, “The Libertarian Case against the War in Afghanistan,” *Canada's Journal of Ideas* (February 23, 2009) at <http://www.westernstandard.ca/web-site/article.php?id=2925>

147. Justin Raimundo, “With Obama in Office, Liberals Learn to Love War,” *Antiwar.com* (April 20, 2009) at <http://www.amconmag.com/article/2009/apr/20/00020/>

148. See Eric Margolis, “Renta-Rambos,” *LewRockwell.com* (March 23, 2010) at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/margolis/margolis184.html>

149. See Tim Shorrock, “America's New Mercenaries,” *The Daily Beast* (December 15, 2010) at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-12-15/counterinsurgency-outsourcing-americas-new-mercenaries-in-afghanistan-middle-east-africa/>

150. See my “Newspeak of the AP Reporting on Afghanistan and Its Silence about 1,000 Afghan Civilians Killed by the US/NATO so far in 2007,” *RAWA News* (December 2, 2007) at <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/rawanews.php?id=355>



151. Ivan Eland, "Why Most Counterinsurgency Wars Fail," *The Independent Institute* (November 11, 2009) at <http://www.independent.org/news-room/article.asp?id=2659>

152. Fisk, op. cit

153. Judy Dempsey and Matthew Saltmarsh, "Germany Joins Allies in Planning to Quit Afghanistan," *New York Times* (December 16, 2010) at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/17/world/europe/17germany.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss

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 1986¹⁵².

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 2011¹⁵³. 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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