JSOC OR CIA? SECRECY INHERENT IN US GWOT IMPEDES WARDAK INVESTIGATION

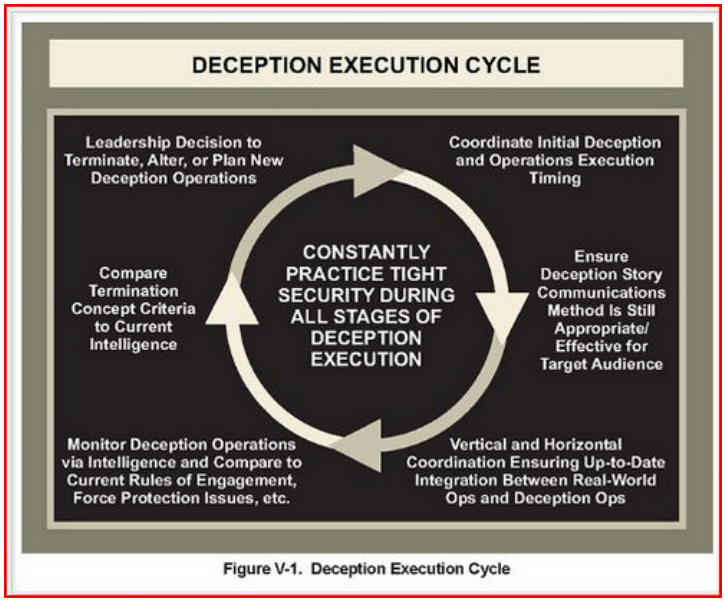

Figure V-1. Deception Execution Cycle

Description of the military's deception-execution cycle from a 2006 Joint Chiefs publication.

In his article that the New York Times today cowardly labelled as "news analysis" rather than straight reporting, Matthew Rosenberg makes a number of astute observations regarding Afghan accusations that groups affiliated with US Special Operations forces have been responsible for a number of atrocities in Maidan Wardak province, prompting Hamid Karzai's call to expel them. Perhaps the most important observation comes almost as an aside, when he links to this story on Special Operations troops covering up their murder of innocent women during a night raid, going so far as to dig bullets out of their corpses in order to impede the subsequent investigation. Here is the reference in its wider context of overall Afghan concerns about Special Operations forces and their reliance on loosely affiliated groups:

> The ban also reflected the Karzai administration's limited patience for the use of Special Operations forces, whose aggressive tactics previously resulted in abuses, and attempted cover-ups. But Afghan officials cited as even more troubling American Special Operations units' use of Afghan proxy forces that are not under the government's control. Afghan civilians and local officials have complained that some irregular forces have looked little different from Taliban fighters or bandits and behaved little differently.

I'll return to Rosenberg's reporting in a bit, but we also have to keep in mind a point that virtually all of the reporting on this incident has covered, and that is the secrecy surrounding Special Operations forces. See, for example, this passage in today's Washington Post article:

> Because Special Operations troops carry out classified missions, it is difficult to independently confirm their activities or links to local groups.
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> "The U.S. has had a long history in Afghanistan of working with some of these irregular militias that are not accountable to anyone," said Sahr Muhammedally, legal adviser for the Center for Civilians in Conflict, who has studied such groups.
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> "A lot of villagers talk about these campaign forces," she said. "It is not the first time I have heard the name…. But the U.S. Special Operations forces don't confirm or deny anything."

Gosh, just as Marcy pointed out yesterday that the media is shocked that Robert Gibbs was told he couldn't confirm or deny the existence of the drone program, now we have Special Operations not being able to confirm or deny their

association with shadowy groups that are responsible for crimes. And yet, even though the media notes the secrecy surrounding the operations, they are unable to point to that secrecy directly within the context of NATO claiming it can find no evidence supporting the Afghan accusations. For example, here is the same Washington Post article again:

> But NATO said its past inquiries found no evidence to support allegations of misconduct by U.S. Special Operations forces in Wardak province, southwest of Kabul.

That was the second paragraph in the article and yet, when they get to the passage on secrecy six paragraphs later, they merely point out that the classified nature of the work makes independent confirmation difficult and completely overlook the role that a Glomar-type response would play in making it impossible for NATO to find evidence because that evidence is classified and cannot be provided to NATO from JSOC.

Note added in clarification: Marcy points out to me via email that it would be more accurate to state here that CIA and/or JSOC would deny the existence of these operations because they are covert, not because they are classified.

Another vitally important point where Rosenberg stands apart from all the other reporting on this issue is his mention that we might be dealing here with a militia supported by the CIA rather than JSOC:

> Rather, some Afghan officials believe the suspects are part of a force whose existence has been kept secret by the Americans.
>
> Therein lies a major point of confusion: officials at the coalition and a separate American command, United States Forces-Afghanistan, which operates many of the Special Operations units in the country, say they do not run any secret

> militias. “My total honest answer: We have no idea what they’re talking about,” a senior American officer said.
>
> One possibility that would match the descriptions of attackers offered by local Afghan officials and, at the same time, exclude American military forces would be that the suspects were working with the Central Intelligence Agency, whose operatives run militias in a number of provinces. A spokesman for the C.I.A. refused to comment on the issue.
>
> One senior Afghan official said it was possible: Afghans, he said, make no distinction between military-type outfits. Americans with weapons, high-end gear and facial hair were “all special forces. It’s a phrase that catches all.”

Although Rosenberg here makes the same mistake of not reporting that a classified mission would entail officials lying in order to hide its existence, the possibility of the group being CIA-affiliated should not be ignored. As NPR confirmed, Bob Woodward’s book *Obama’s Wars* disclosed a group known as CTPT, or Counter-Terrorism Pursuit Teams. Woodward’s reporting applied to CTPT groups crossing the border into Pakistan, but Rosenberg’s report today appears to expand CTPT’s into additional provinces. More generally, Jeremy Scahill provided a very thorough look at the secret groups run by JSOC and CIA in Pakistan. It is not a huge leap to assume that similar secret groups are active in Afghanistan.

In addition to the hiding of information by the US, it looks like there is an attempt to discredit the information on which Karzai made his decision. An article carried today by TOLOnews and quickly parroted by Khaama Press tries to claim Karzai was fed false information:

> “This decision shows lack of

> coordination between the Afghan and foreign forces and also President Karzai was given incorrect information," military expert Jawid Kohistani told TOLOnews on Monday.

Who is the "military expert" quoted here? It appears he is a politician who heads the Freedom and Democracy Movement. He appears only sporadically in a search of the internet, here in this 2004 Frontline episode and then he popped back up in this NPR bit earlier this month. His positions seem remarkably in step with US desires, so his evidence-free claim that Karzai was fed false information looks highly suspect to me. The claim is even more suspect because although I have paid close attention to Afghanistan for a number of years, TOLOnews had not crossed my radar until just this week, so its role here is suspect as well. On its website, TOLOnews claims to be apolitical and to have been broadcasting since 2010, but their web archive looks spotty, showing monthly entries only from September 2011 through July 2012.

Ironically, it appears that the Frontline episode in which Kohistani appeared in 2004 was warning against the danger of relying on armed militias tied to warlords divided along ethnic lines. It now appears that the US, either through JSOC or CIA, has finally gone too far in supporting shadowy groups that could well derive from a warlord's militia and has caused an international incident that could well lead Afghanistan to deny criminal liability to US forces after the 2014 slated end-date of the NATO mission, forcing the same total withdrawal we had in Iraq.