

# Australian adviser to US military provides chilling insight into neo-colonial mentality

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David Kilcullen, a top Australian-born advisor to the US military, delivered the annual Wallace Wurth Memorial Lecture at the University of New South Wales in Sydney on September 3. His remarks provided an insight into the methods and mentality of those directing the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Kilcullen, 42, has had a rapid rise to international prominence. In 2004, he was a lieutenant colonel in the Australian Army, with experience in the Australian occupation of East Timor in 1999 and academic study in the field of counter-insurgency (COIN) warfare. His PhD thesis involved a study of Islamic extremism in Indonesia. He was seconded to the Pentagon and soon left the Australian armed forces to work for the Bush administration as a “chief strategist” for the State Department’s Coordinator for Counterterrorism, reporting to then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Kilcullen’s assessment of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars broadly parallels that of a layer of top US commanders. In February 2007, he was employed as a counter-insurgency advisor to General David Petraeus, who had been appointed overall commander of US forces in Iraq. Throughout much of that year, Kilcullen was responsible for monitoring the COIN tactics that were implemented during the so-called “surge”.

This year, Kilcullen has published a book, *The Accidental Guerilla*, which has been praised in foreign policy and military circles as a summation of the counter-insurgency lessons from the two wars. In the coming months, he is scheduled to take up a position as a senior aide to the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, who has begun implementing the first stage of the Obama administration’s “surge” in that country.

The theme of Kilcullen’s lecture was “Defeating Global Terrorism”. What it actually contained was a presentation of the tactics that were used in Iraq, described as “clear, hold, build” in current military manuals, and outlined how they should be applied in Afghanistan. The central tenet of Kilcullen’s COIN theory is “support follows strength”—in other words, that force convinces. Perhaps sensing the audience had not grasped his meaning, he cited Mao Zedong’s dictum that “power comes from the barrel of a gun”.

Kilcullen asserts that most armed resistance to the US-led occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq is carried out by “accidental guerillas”—people who are fighting only because foreign powers “are intruding in their space”. This formulation deliberately obscures the fact that insurgencies reflect a legitimate, political rejection of neo-colonial oppression by the occupied populations. According to Kilcullen, people are primarily motivated by self-interest and will therefore “do almost anything or support anyone for the gift of safety”. Providing the occupying forces prove they are stronger than the insurgency, the population will ultimately accept being ruled by a US puppet state.

To defeat the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, he told the audience, it was necessary to establish a “permanent presence” at the local level, particularly in the main cities and towns. Rather than operations to hunt down insurgents, occupation forces should focus on the controlled areas, constructing the framework for a functional puppet state that can ultimately replace them, including reliable police, courts and local government. Moreover, the insurgents would be forced to attack the foreign troops in populated areas. The likely civilian casualties would lead people to turn against them.

At the same time, bribes would be offered to sections of the insurgency to change sides, and areas under insurgent control subjected to collective economic punishment, such as denying them access to goods and essential services. The calculation behind this particular tactic is that sections of the population will blame the insurgents for their deprivation and voluntarily seek out occupation control.

Translated from his clinical, pseudo-academic language, Kilcullen advocates overwhelming violence and repression against the Afghan people. The overall aim is to kill, buy-off or terrify all those who oppose the occupation—the vast majority of the population—until everyone submits to the occupiers’ “system of control”.

In line with Washington’s recriminations against the current Afghan puppet President Hamid Karzai, Kilcullen labelled his administration as “corrupt and dysfunctional” and stated there was “a crisis of legitimacy” because “the same warlords are back in

power who the Taliban overthrew in 1996”.

In much of Afghanistan, he said, the Taliban have established a shadow government that has “outgoverned” Karzai. Without a major change in occupation tactics, there is “little doubt we are eventually going to lose”. A “window of opportunity” nevertheless existed, he declared, to “fix what is wrong at the local level” and establish the “rule of law”.

Kilcullen did not state how many more US, European and Australian troops he thought should be sent to Afghanistan, or for how long they would need to stay. There is little doubt, however, that his figure would be large and the time frame long.

Even when all the 21,000 reinforcements sent by the Obama administration arrive, there will be barely 100,000 foreign troops in the country, along with a dysfunctional 85,000-strong Afghan government army. The Iraq surge, by contrast, was implemented by a force of 160,000 American personnel, tens of thousands of armed mercenary contractors and a 200,000-strong Iraqi army.

According to Kilcullen, the Iraq surge was a “success” because it resulted in some 100,000 Sunni Arab insurgents ending their resistance and enlisting in US-paid militias that came to be known as the “Sons of Iraq” or *sahwa*.

The main factor behind their surrender, however, was the killing, repression and displacement of Sunni civilians by the US military and pro-occupation Shiite militias over the previous four years. Long before 30,000 additional American troops arrived in the country, tens of thousands of ordinary people had been murdered and as many as two million forced from their homes, especially from the Sunni suburbs of Baghdad, where the insurgency had its main base of support.

The “clear, hold, build” tactics consisted in enclosing entire suburbs behind 12-foot high concrete walls, denying the population electricity and food supplies and systematically slaughtering any who continued to resist. While Kilcullen did not mention it, the COIN tactics he monitored in Iraq relied heavily on the use of special forces units to assassinate alleged insurgent leaders, commanders, financiers and technical personnel, and to generally terrorise the population.

After the Sunni population was subdued, opposition to the occupation among the largely Shiite working class was crushed in similar fashion in Basra and Baghdad’s Sadr City district. In the first months of 2008 alone, according to the Iraqi government, over 2,000 members of the Shiite Mahdi Army militia were assassinated or killed in combat operations.

Kilcullen justified his call for the escalation of the war in Afghanistan with the claim that the “West” had a “moral obligation” to the Afghan people. The reality is that it will require mass killing in both Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan to duplicate the terror that prevailed in Iraq in 2007 and

led insurgents to accept the occupation’s “system of control”. The displacement of over two million people from areas of North West Pakistan and the recent reports of pro-government death squads operating in Swat Valley is evidence that it is already well underway.

Men like Kilcullen are well aware of the real motives behind these predatory wars of imperialist plunder. He would be intimately familiar with the voluminous writings by US strategic thinktanks following the Cold War on the importance of US imperialism’s domination of the Central Asian region and the necessity of controlling the flow of oil from Middle East. The war on terrorism is simply the pretext to accomplish these neo-colonial aims.

In a revealing part of his lecture, Kilcullen referred to his studies of the tactics of German commanders responsible for the occupation of areas of Eastern Europe during World War II. The problem they had faced in curbing insurgencies, he said, was that the “rapacious nature”, “economic interests” and “genocidal policies” of the Nazi state had thwarted their local level efforts to win over the occupied peoples.

The character of counter-insurgency, he stated, “mirrors the state carrying it out”. While damning Nazi Germany, Kilcullen simply asserted that the US and its Western allies were “good states”. However, if one follows his logic and considers the character of the US-led counter-insurgency, with its countless atrocities and the deaths of an estimated 1.2 million Iraqis and unknown numbers of Afghans, then one would have to conclude that US imperialism is just as “rapacious” in its drive for “economic interests” as its German counterpart.

David Kilcullen is coldly indifferent to the criminality of US foreign policy and the immense suffering it has caused. In his book, he writes that “the task of the moment is not to cry over split milk but clean it up” and “not to second-guess the decisions of 2003 but to get on with the job at hand”. In helping to devise and carry out these war crimes, Kilcullen is remarkably similar to the Nazi officers who also “got on with the job at hand”.



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