

# US military escalates its dirty war in Afghanistan

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The *New York Times* reported Sunday that American special forces units are operating in and around the Afghan city of Kandahar, assassinating or capturing alleged leaders and militants of the Taliban resistance ahead of the major US-NATO offensive scheduled for June.

Suggestive of the sinister and murderous character of such operations, the *Times* noted that the “opening salvos of the offensive are being carried out in the shadows”. It reported that “elite” units had been “picking up or picking off insurgent leaders” for the past several weeks.

A “senior American military officer” boasted that “large numbers of [the] insurgent leadership based in and around Kandahar have been captured or killed”, but that it was “still a contested battle space.”

The *Times* reported that “more than a dozen military and civilian officials directly involved in the Kandahar offensive” had agreed to speak about the special forces’ activities because it would help “scare off insurgents” before the bulk of American troops move into Taliban-held areas of the city. This claim is either patent nonsense or deliberate deception. The Taliban do not require an article in the American media to inform them that “large numbers” of their fighters are being killed or captured.

The real motive for the article is to introduce the audience of the *New York Times* and broader public opinion to the reality of the dirty war that the Obama administration is presiding over in Afghanistan. Assassination, or alternatively, detention without trial under the harshest conditions, is the preferred method of the US military to suppress resistance to the neo-colonial agenda of US imperialism.

The commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, is applying the same tactics that he used during the Bush administration’s “surge” in Iraq in 2007 and 2008, when he was serving under General David Petraeus as the head of the Joint Special Operations

Command (JSOC).

JSOC units are drawn from the Army’s Delta Force and Ranger battalions, the Navy Seals and specialized units of the Air Force. Regular Marine and Army battalions were used during the battles for Karbala, Najaf and Fallujah in 2004. The Iraq “surge” was marked by the use of JSOC, aided by local collaborators, to kill or capture suspected insurgents ahead of the deployment of larger formations into resistance-held areas.

The secretive mass killings and stories of brutal imprisonment generated terror in urban centers like Ramadi, Baqubah, Mosul, Basra, Amarah and the suburbs of Baghdad. It is credited by sections of the US military as playing an equally decisive role in subduing resistance as the parallel policy of bribing insurgents to cease fighting in exchange for amnesty and cash.

The coming assault on Kandahar is the centerpiece of the Obama administration’s plan to shatter the Afghan insurgency and finally impose American control over the country. Kandahar and the neighboring province of Helmand have been the main support bases of the Taliban movement since the mid-1990s. Large swathes of both provinces have remained under its influence since the US invasion in 2001. The majority of the predominantly ethnic Pashtun population is virulently opposed to the presence of foreign forces. They do not accept the authority of the thoroughly corrupt Afghan puppet government headed by President Hamid Karzai.

The bulk of the 30,000 additional troops ordered to Afghanistan this year by Obama are being deployed to either Kandahar or Helmand. Reflecting the views of the White House and the Pentagon, the *New York Times* referred to the coming operation as a “make-or-break offensive”.

Thousands of troops have been positioned to cut off the possibility of reinforcements to or escape from Kandahar. According to the *Times’* sources, American units have

established “several dozen” positions guarding the roads in and out of the city. A 12,000-strong US, British and Canadian force and 10,000 Afghan government soldiers will eventually be involved in the assault.

Before they are moved in, however, JSOC’s death squads have been unleashed.

An unnamed US official told the *Los Angeles Times* last month that a number of JSOC’s units had been transferred to Afghanistan under the Obama administration because “hunting season is over in Iraq”. According to the *LA Times*’ sources, JSOC currently has 5,800 personnel at its disposal in Afghanistan—double the number used during the Iraq surge. They are conducting assassination or snatch missions across the country, assisted by Special Forces units from Britain, Australia, New Zealand and some NATO states.

There is no concrete figure as to how many alleged insurgents have been assassinated in Kandahar or elsewhere in Afghanistan. JSOC operations take place under the cloak of total censorship. Nor does the US military provide any details as to the criteria used by JSOC to determine its choice of victims. It is not known, for example, if the killings are limited to armed combatants, or extends to anyone who provides political or material support to the insurgency. There is also no accountability as to how the identity of targets is verified, given that most operations take place in the dead of night, or over how many civilians are being killed or injured in the process.

There is a litany of recorded cases in which non-combatants were massacred during operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In the most recent example, raids last Friday and Saturday night on alleged Taliban in the eastern Afghan province of Logar resulted in the death of the local school principal and religious leader. The killing provoked an eruption of anger. A crowd of Afghans surrounded and set ablaze a column of 12 trucks carrying fuel to a nearby NATO base.

A teacher from the area, Mohammed Sharif, told the *New York Times*, “People are fed up with these night raids and wilful operations. They are raiding houses during the night, killing innocent people. Sometimes they kill opposition people as well, but usually they are harming ordinary and innocent people.”

Alleged insurgents who are detained disappear into various US and Afghan government-run prisons. The British Broadcasting Corporation reported on April 15 that a secret area of a prison facility at Bagram Air Base is being used to subject detainees to beatings, sleep

deprivation and psychological stress, as part of an interrogation regime. The allegations were based on interviews or signed statements by nine former inmates. The charges were predictably denied by the US military.

JSOC also works closely with the CIA’s “Special Activities Division”, which is particularly involved in the assassination of alleged Afghan and Pakistani Taliban militants in the remote tribal agencies of North West Pakistan. The main method currently used for the killings is Hellfire missiles launched from remotely flown Predator drones. According to the Pakistani military, such strikes have slaughtered well over 700 innocent civilians since Obama took office, fueling support in the border region for the anti-occupation insurgency. On the weekend, two more Predator attacks were carried out in the agency of North Waziristan, killing at least 12 people.

An article in Monday’s *New York Times* detailed the latest innovations of the CIA to carry out its remote-controlled assassinations. They include the coffee-cup-sized, 35-pound “Small Smart Weapon” that can be “fitted with four different guidance systems that allow it to home in on targets as small as a single person in complete darkness” and a “small thermobaric warhead, which detonates a cocktail of explosive powders on impact to create a pressure wave that kills humans but leaves structures relatively intact”.

Justified in 2001 as a “war on terrorism”, the Afghan occupation has always been an attempt to impose US dominance over a strategic area of Central Asia. The only change in the conduct of the war from the Bush to the Obama White Houses has been the escalation of the number of troops involved and the greater use of a secretive apparatus of assassins to carry out the murderous repression of the Afghan people.



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