**Police Training and the Mercenarization of US Warfare in the War on Terror (HAW)**

In “The Secret,” James Drought tells the story of Frank Nolan, a working class kid from Chicago who enlisted in the army during the Korean War to see the world and escape working for Ford Motor Company. Trained as an infantryman, Nolan was sent out on a dangerous mission to reclaim a nondescript hill, largely as a means of impressing a visiting congressional delegation. The North Korean forces had learned of the attack in advance and slaughtered his unit; Nolan lost his leg. After being awarded a bronze star and Purple Heart while lying in hospice, Nolan told the Congressman and General sent to congratulate him that “they could cram all the goddam medals up their ass.” He told Drought: “You know what they did? They smiled at me. They said they understood.” “Understood what,” Drought asked him. “I don’t know,” he responded. “The dirty cocksuckers just patted me on the shoulder and said they understood.”

Drought concluding his piece by writing that “the unfortunate thing that I discovered was that the fat cats are not content to exploit us, bleed us, work us for the rest of our lives at their benefit, but they also want to win some glory too. This is why every once and a while they start to fight a war for us to fight in….the younger souls were always told that war gave them a chance to test their manhood, their courage and all that. You can tell how great, the young were informed, by how willing you are to give up your life, to charge the blazing guns for your buddies and for your country; and when it is all over you will never be afraid again, because you will have discovered yourself. Nobody mentioned what those would discover who lay ripped open after the battle, bleeding, dying, dead from monstrous wounds.”

The comments in this piece are universal I think and resonate given the theme of our conference.

A turning point in American history occurred during the latter phases of the Vietnam War when GIs who felt the same way as Frank Nolan and James Drought began rebelling and a mass protest movement developed which resulted in the abolishing of the draft and a permanent culture of skepticism towards US militarism. The lies being fed by the fat cats to sustain war were no longer being bought by a good portion of the public (with 70% of the public having come to believe the Vietnam War was unjust). George McGovern campaigned on a “come home America” in 1972, and his liberal counterpart Ted Kennedy stated that the US should no longer be the world’s policeman. The fat cats, however, struck back and championed Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then the Bush family and the neoconservative movement took hold seeking to reestablish American hegemony in the world – open investment and trade that benefits US multi-national corporation, the maintenance of high military budgets to the benefit of the complex and a reinvigoration what Chalmers Johnson has described as the “empire of military bases.” However, many in the public were still skeptical and more critical - and so a lot of US interventions had to be carried out covertly and by proxy from Reagan through the present. The model was the secret war in Laos, where tribal minorities were organized as a proxy army to fight the left-wing Pathet Lao (while the north was heavily bombed). The Bush II administration made the calculation that they could not restore the draft or there would be protests in the streets on the level of Vietnam – so, after invading Iraq and Afghanistan, they championed a strategy that relied increasingly on air power, drones and the subcontracting of counter-insurgency to strategic proxies. Private mercenary companies have been increasingly used for training and CI purposes as a means of further distancing the imperial wars from the public, and evading accountability for human rights abuses and congressional restrictions on military aid. The hogs have really been feeding all the while, as war has been turned into a profitable business on a level that some of the fat cats from the Korean or even Vietnam War eras could hardly have conceived. In 2010, the corporate military industry made $200 billion in profits!

One of the most important functions that these “whores of war” have carried out is the training of foreign police and security forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq as a means of shifting the fighting burden away from Americans.The State Department gave DynCorp International of Fall Church Virginia the major contract. DynCorp’s Board included many ex-CIA operatives, including Richard Secord of Iran-Contra fame. It was originally an engineering company that had supplied airlifts to US troops in the Korean War. In the 1990s, DynCorp ran the drug war in Latin America, including aerial spraying operations that evaded congressional restriction on aid to the Colombian military and trained police in Bosnia where 2 of its advisers were linked to the child sex slave trade. They were also involved in illegal arms deals and smuggled cocaine out of Columbia.

Operating with few legal restrictions, Dyncorp contractors alienated the population in Iraq and Afghanistan through such practices as “driving through the streets fast and furious without regard for the locals,” public drunkenness, whoring, and torturing and shooting civilians. One of their slogans was “I do this job for the opportunity to kill the enemies of my country and also to get that boat I always wanted. . . . [W]hen engaged I will lay waste to everything around me.”

Dyncorp trained police evolved as instruments of the brutal and corrupt regimes backed by the US (Al Maliki in Iraq and Karzai in Afghanistan). Historically, the forces trained by the United States to subdue their own countrymen have taken on the character of paid mercenaries with little loyalty to the cause they purportedly represent. Iraq is no exception⎯except that they were now being trained by mercenaries. Asked by a Wall Street reporter about America’s stated goal of bringing democracy to Iraq, cadets giggled and pointed to the nearby Ministry of Oil, the only major ministerial building U.S. troops saved from looters during the invasion. “They want our oil,” said twenty-year-old Hassan Muhned. “We have no democracy now. Maybe we will have it if the Americans leave.” But, he added, they should not leave until he was paid.

These comments exemplify the cynical reasons why many join US-trained forces. Many Iraqi police expressed resentment toward Americans and rarely acknowledged their advice, condemning them as cowardly and hypocritical for not taking the same risks to their lives and for being better protected from attack. A police lieutenant in Baghdad complained, “The [Americans] hide behind the barricades while we are here in the streets without even guns to protect ourselves.” American advisers harbored racial stereotypes of Iraqis and had a paternalistic and colonial mindset. In a memoir of his year in Iraq, Robert Cole, a police officer from East Palo Alto, California, and a DynCorp employee, explains that these attitudes were ingrained in a mini–boot camp training session, where he was “brainwashed, reprogrammed, and desensitized” and “morphed” into a “trained professional killer.” One of the major lessons taught was that Iraqis understand only force. Cole was told to shoot first and think later and to instruct police to do the same. “If you see a suspicious Iraqi civilian, pull your weapon and gun him down,” he was instructed. “You don’t fire one . . . or two shots. . . . You riddle his sorry ass with bullets until you’re sure he’s dead as a doorknob.”

This is an inversion not just of democratic police methods but even of Western counterinsurgency doctrine, which, at least in theory, advocates moderation in the use of force in order to avoid antagonizing the population and creating martyrs. No wonder the scope of violence has been so vast. During the period “Saint” David Petraeus (as he was treated by the US media before his affair was uncovered) was involved with the programs – US trained police evolved into Shia death squads. Investigative journalists and two hundred academics opposed to the U.S. invasion were among those assassinated, including Abdul Latif al-Mayah, the director of the Baghdad Center for Human Rights, who denounced the corruption of the Iraqi Governing Council on Al-Jazeera television twelve hours before he was killed. According to the *New Statesman*, al-Mayah “spoke for people on the street and made some politicians quite jealous.” One of the key advisers to police commandos was James Steele who worked in El Salvador during its dirty war there in the 1980s, where police under his command were similarly linked to death squad activity. The US ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s – John Negroponte served as a key administrator in the US occupation.

Afghanistan you have a situation where many police just signed up for training to get a gun and joined the insurgents. In a March 19, 2010, cover story, “The Gang That Couldn’t Shoot Straight,” *Newsweek* reported that although the United States had spent $6 billion trying to create an effective police force in Afghanistan, officers could barely shoot a rifle or hit a target fifty meters away, and much of the ammunition wound up being used by insurgents.Mohammed Moqim, an eight-year veteran of the force, wasquoted as saying: “We are still at zero. [Recruits] don’t listen, are undisciplined and will never be real policemen.” In record numbers police have been killing their trainers or revolting in other ways. The police are notoriously brutal and corrupt, routinely shaking-down civilians, shooting demonstrators, terrorizing people in raids and intimidating voters during fraudulent elections. In Babaji north of LaskgarGah, police bent on taking revenge against clan rivals abducted and raped pre-teen girls and boys. The Kabul chief of police in 2006, Jamil Jumbish, was implicated in murder, torture and bribery and his replacement, Amanullah Guzar, extortion, land grabbing and kidnapping three UN workers. The above abuses fit with a historical pattern and are partly a product of the social polarizations and corruption bred by the U.S.-NATO intervention and mobilization of police for military and political ends.

The Wikileaks “Afghan War Logs” confirm wide-scale police brutality and its cover-up. In one incident, the chief of police in Balkh Province raped a sixteen year old girl and ordered his body guard to fire on a civilian who tried to report the incident. When the bodyguard refused, he was shot to death.

The lack of an effective judicial or legal system and Bush administration’s support for torture hastened the ANP’s lawlessness. The Red Cross reported massive prison overcrowding, “harsh” conditions, a lack of clarity about the legal basis for detention and inmates being subjected to “cruel” treatment in violation of the Geneva Conventions, including hanging from the ceiling and sexual abuse of women and juveniles incarcerated for escaping bad marriages. Sensory deprivation and other forms of psychological torture were common, leading prisoners to go insane. Many were held without charges for years in facilities lacking rudimentary toilets. An undisclosed number died in custody, including hundreds transported by army chief of staff Rashid Dostum in unventilated containers where they suffocated to death or were shot.

The abuses associated with police training programs and the subcontracting of counter-insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan fit a long historical precedent.Police training has been a feature of US imperial strategy dating to the era of the Indian wars and US conquest of the Philippines. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the US military created police constabularies in countries occupied by the United States – namely the Philippines, Haiti and Nicaragua – particularly as US military forces were drawn down. These constabularies were trained explicitly for the purpose of suppressing nationalist and messianic peasant revolts, and committed myriad brutalities, evolving in most cases into the instruments of political dictators such as the infamous Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, a US protégé. The police programs generally embody, Alfred W. McCoy notes, a U.S. imperial style grounded in the quest for serviceable information but not deep knowledge of the subject society. During the Cold War, police training was codified under the USAID’s Office of Public Safety, established by the Kennedy administration in 1962 to “develop the civilian police component of internal security forces in underdeveloped states.” Until it was disbanded in 1974, the OPS supplied approximately half a billion dollars’ worth of equipment, advisers, and training toward these ends. Hundreds of foreign police were brought each year for training to the International Police Academy (IPA) in Washington, D.C., considered the West Point of law enforcement. The IPA provided instruction in police administration, scientific methods, counterintelligence, and anticommunist ideology. One of its trademarks was a two-story pistol range with cardboard targets dressed as “subversives.” The culmination was a mock counterinsurgency operation in which students had to suppress a disturbance and protect the ruling government from being swept from power.

The worst abuses associated with OPS training occurred in South Korea where police were engaged in systematic torture, the Southern Cone, Guatemala, and South Vietnam, where police training was a crucial element of counter-insurgency in the genocidal war. The OPS built up the police-security apparatus, first under Ngo Dinh Diem, provided millions of dollars in small arms, and helping police to systemize their records collections system so as to develop computerized lists of suspected “Vietcong agents” who were targeted to be “neutralized” – meaning usually tortured or assassinated. The police programs evolved into the infamous operation Phoenix, a terrorist program which resulted in barbarous tortures – including the planting of electrodes in the brains of VC detainees – and the death of at least 40,000 people, according to the testimony of deceased CIA director William Colby. The OPS ran the prison apparatus in Vietnam, where notorious abuses took place such as at the Tiger Cages of Con Son.

Owing to its link to human rights abuses, the OPS was abolished in 1973, however, the Reagan administration revived police training through covert means; the programs were then re-institutionalized as a central dimension of US COIN operations under the War on Terror. The training of police was especially significant for intelligence operations, and they were a cost effective way of fighting a war and helping to minimize the levels of US troops and US casualties, thus helping to limit public dissent. The Pentagon issued Taser guns (used by American law enforcement agencies to incapacitate suspects through the release of twenty-six watts of electrical energy) and provided high-tech radio, computer, and surveillance equipment, which enabled the Iraqi police to collect over a million fingerprints, which were scanned through satellite link to Washington. This embodied a distrust of the population endemic to COIN operations and imperial interventions in history more broadly. That the police evolved in a brutal and corrupt way should be no surprise given the context……..

Gabriel Kolko explained in *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States and the Modern Historical Experience* that “the functions, actions and values of officers and soldiers are the inevitable consequence of the kinds of society they are seeking to create or defend,” which in the most recent cases are corrupt, quasi-colonial creations of the United States. The subcontracting of counter-insurgency through police programs generally reflect the theme of the panel – “The Distancing of War” as programs are carried out secretly, by private contractors unaccountable to congress or international law. They contribute to the exacerbation of ethnic violence and hatred, the destabilization of the social order. The police programs programs have solved a problem for US imperial architects in that they can be run relatively on the cheap and they prevent public protest at home; they allow for the advancement of US strategic interests without having to resort to a draft, and they minimize the numbers of US casualties, both physical and psychological. While too many US soldiers have died or have been maimed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the numbers are far less than Korea and Vietnam. If the numbers were higher and if the sons and daughters of the elite were being drafted, they would be more prone dissent, as they did in the 1960s. Instead, protests against the endless perpetuation of the War on Terror have been relatively limited.