

‘P2OG’ allows Pentagon to fight dirty

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"Run away from the light": Such might be the motto of a new, covert policy that the Bush administration is considering implementing. According to recent news reports, it would be the largest expansion into the world of black ops and covert action since the end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s.

And that's saying quite a lot, considering that since Vietnam the Pentagon has not exactly been dormant in this area.

As well-known military analyst William Arkin pointed out in an October 27 column in the *Los Angeles Times*, the development of the Pentagon's covert counter-terror capability has its roots in the 1979 Iran hostage crisis. The army created a highly compartmentalized organization that could collect clandestine intelligence independent of the rest of the US intelligence community, and follow through with covert military action. Today, it operates under the code name Grey Fox. In Afghanistan it operated alongside the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) paramilitary Special Activities Division and the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command.

Then there are numerous recent initiatives, such as net assessment capabilities at combatant commands, a new campaign support group at Fort Bragg, a counter-terrorism Technology Support Office, to name just a few.

Yet the Pentagon wants more. Its Defense Science Board (DSB) conducted a 2002 "Summer Study on Special Operations and Joint Forces in Support of Countering Terrorism". Excerpts from that study, dated August 16, were leaked and obtained by the Federation of American Scientists, which posted them on their website. The report was produced by a 10-member panel of military experts that included Vice Admiral William O Studeman, former director of the National Security Agency.

According to the leak, the United States is engaged in a global war on terrorism that is "a real war" in case anyone doubts it. This means, among other things, a "committed, resourceful and globally dispersed adversary with strategic reach" against whom the US will wage "a long, at times violent, and borderless war" which "requires new strategies, postures and organization".

That explains why the United States has, so to speak, decided to fight fire with fire. Although the study is filled with lots of the usual buzzwords and phrases that Pentagon planners love, such as "robust connectivity, agile ground forces, adaptive joint command and control and discriminant use of force", one thing that does stand out is its call for "preemption/proaction/interdiction/disruption/quick-response capabilities".

This is consistent with the administration's new National Security Strategy, which called for preemption; indeed, since the DSB study preceded the release of the strategy, it is possible that the strategy was written to incorporate some of its aspects.

The study urges the Pentagon to "take the terrorist threat as seriously as it takes the likelihood and consequences of major theater war", urging officials to launch secret missions and intelligence operations to penetrate and disrupt terrorist cells abroad. Some of those operations should be aimed at signaling to countries that harbor terrorists that "their sovereignty will be at risk".

If adopted, some of the proposals appear to push the military into territory that traditionally has been the domain of the CIA, raising questions about whether such missions would be subject to the same legal restraints imposed on CIA activities.

But William Schneider Jr, chairman of the DSB, rejected such concerns, saying that the panel set out to identify ways that special operations units could do more to assist the war on terrorism, not encroach on other agencies' authority.

"The CIA executes the plans but they use Department of Defense assets," Schneider said. He emphasized that the board was not recommending any changes to long-standing US policies banning assassinations, or requiring presidents to approve in advance US covert operations. Nor, he said, was the panel advocating changes that would erode congressional oversight.

Yet lawmakers have expressed concern with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's push to expand the Pentagon's covert capabilities, mainly because the Pentagon is not subject to rules that require the CIA to report its covert activities to Congress.

The DSB summary document suggests that many changes are already under way. It cites the expansion of existing intelligence analysis centers and the creation of new management teams to direct covert operations at such installations as Fort Bragg, where US special forces such as Delta Force are based.

It recommends the creation of a super-Intelligence Support Activity, an organization it dubs the Proactive, Preemptive Operations Group (P2OG), to bring together CIA and military covert action, information warfare, intelligence and cover and deception. For example, the Pentagon and CIA would work together to increase human intelligence (HUMINT) forward/operational presence and to deploy new clandestine technical capabilities.

To bolster government HUMINT capabilities, the task force advances the idea of an intelligence "surge/unsurge" capability -- a "robust, global cadre of retirees, reservists and others who are trained and qualified to serve on short notice, including expatriates". This group could be pressed into service during times of crisis.

P2OG would launch secret operations aimed at "stimulating reactions" among terrorists and states possessing weapons of mass destruction, meaning it would prod terrorist cells into action, thus exposing them to "quick-response" attacks by US forces. The means by which it would do this is the far greater use of special operations forces.

Responsibility and accountability for the P2OG would be vested in a "Special Operations Executive" in the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC would plan operations but not oversee their execution in order to avoid comparisons to past abuses, such as the Iran-Contra operations run out of the NSC by Oliver North during the Reagan administration. Under the board's proposal, NSC plans would be executed by the Pentagon or the CIA.

Costs would include developing new means to enable "deep penetration of adversaries" (\$1.7 billion annually); exercises and gaming (\$100 million annually); development of technical capabilities and the hiring of 500 new staff (\$800 million annually); establishment of centers of excellence to handle increased workload (\$500 million annually); and expansion of the Joint Forces net assessment activity (\$100 million annually). The total cost is envisaged as \$3.3 billion.

The DSB study also provides tantalizing glimpses of new capabilities already in the works, referring to new high-tech sensors in development that would enable the United States more closely to track the movements of vehicles or even individuals by satellite. Some of these capabilities are already advanced, such as high-altitude airships, thermobaric weapons and improved urban assault capabilities. Other new projects are being executed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

If the DSB proposal is adopted, it would only reinforce recent Pentagon activity. The *Washington Post* reported last month that the Pentagon was preparing to consolidate control of most of the global war on terrorism under the US Special Operations Command, signaling an intensified but more covert approach to the next phase in the battle against al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups.

Special Operations units have been active in Pakistan for months and are training military forces in Yemen and Georgia. These missions could provide a cover for conducting any covert raids and other actions against suspected al-Qaeda members in the two countries.

The United States has also placed more than 500 Special Operations troops in the African nation of Djibouti, where they are near potential hot spots such as Yemen and Somalia. The USS Belleau Wood, an amphibious assault ship that carries attack helicopters and a handful of Harrier jump jets, has been stationed off the Horn of Africa for about six weeks, ready to carry those troops and some specialized helicopters.

And, in early October, the *Washington Times* reported that US commandos hunting Taliban and al-Qaeda guerrillas in Afghanistan gained permission to employ "source operations" -- clandestine tactics typically confined to the CIA.

"Source operations" generally refers to recruiting and maintaining spies within the enemy's camp. In Afghanistan, it means finding Afghans and Arabs, possibly within the Taliban and al-Qaeda network, who would supply intelligence to US special-operations forces.

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<http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/P2OG.html>