

# Obama's 'Liberal' Killings in His War-for-War's-Sake in Afghanistan

by Ramtanu Maitra

March 11—Why are U.S. troops still killing and dying in Afghanistan, already the longest war in U.S. history? What are we achieving there? What possible outcome will ever allow them to return home—and when is it expected to happen? What have the deaths and maimings of Afghans, Americans and others achieved in sixteen years of war? All the broken families, all the heartaches—for what? And when will Barack Obama finally be made to answer these questions?

Prolonging an already six year-old war in Afghanistan and continuing it throughout his eight-year tenure by using deceptions, President Barack Obama has ended his years in the Oval Office with very little to show to the American people, other than a pile of dead bodies. Obama's "necessary war" in Afghanistan will not benefit the United States even an iota in the short or long run. All that Obama did during those eight years was to help kill more American soldiers and Afghans, civilians in particular, and leave behind a divided and increasingly ungovernable Afghanistan.

Seemingly, from the outset of his presidency, Obama adopted deception to hide his cold-blooded killer's instinct. For instance, "two days after taking the oath of office, Obama signed an Executive Order, which revoked the Bush-era directives authorizing torture, and re-emphasized international conventions and federal laws prohibiting torture. The following day, Obama authorized two Central Intelligence Agency drone strikes in northwest Pakistan, which, combined, killed an estimated one militant and ten civilians, including between



*Effects of a drone in Pakistan, neighboring Afghanistan.*

four and five children.”<sup>1</sup> Obviously, these drone strikes violated all international conventions.

From the beginning, Obama was equally deceptive concerning troop strength in Afghanistan. In January 2009, soon after he moved into the White House, he wanted a review of the U.S. troop strength—but even before the review was completed, he sent 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, bringing the total to nearly 70,000 American troops on the ground.

During his eight years as commander-in-chief, Obama oversaw the deaths of 2,499 U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of those, 1,906 were killed in and around Afghanistan. That is about 75% of all U.S. soldiers killed since 2001. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had 9,200 new patients in Af-

1. Micah Zenko, "Obama's Embrace of Drone Strikes Will Be a Lasting Legacy," *The New York Times*, Jan. 12, 2016.

ghanistan in 2015, and 1,261 were amputees. In addition, thousands have suffered crippling physical and mental injuries that have virtually destroyed their lives and killed their own and their family's dreams.

During his tenure at the White House, Obama conducted airstrikes on seven countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. These airstrikes, and the war waged by Bush and Obama in Afghanistan with no discernable objective, have killed thousands of Afghan civilians. About 60% of these deaths were immediately caused by the enemy side of the Bush-Obama war, such as the Taliban.

## Loss of Thousands of Lives

According to a July 2016 report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the total number of civilian casualties recorded by the UN between Jan. 1, 2009 and June 30, 2016, has risen to 63,934, including 22,941 deaths and 40,993 injured. Subsequently, the UN-reported civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2016 were the highest ever recorded, with nearly 11,500 non-combatants—one-third of them children—killed or wounded. Fighting between Afghan security forces and armed groups, especially in populated areas, remained “the leading cause of civilian casualties” more than two years after NATO’s combat mission ended, said UNAMA, which began documenting civilian casualties in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

It was evident at the beginning of 2009, when



DoD photo/Roland Balik, U.S. Air Force

*The remains of four U.S. Army members being transported to Dover Air Force Base, Del., Jan. 8, 2012.*



U.S. Army/Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden

*Marine Corps Cpl. Raymond Hennagir with the ball during training for the Warrior Games for wounded veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., April 13, 2010.*

Obama took charge of his “necessary war” in Afghanistan, that Washington had no clue who were its friends, who were its enemies, and what lies at the end of the killing in Afghanistan’s mountains and valleys. Yet, Obama pushed forward with his killings, promising the American people that with the help of the U.S. and NATO troops, and his pro-active policy, the Washington-backed government in Kabul would be able to wrest control of the territories that were under the control of the Taliban. Did that happen? No, of course, it did not. The question is: Was it ever intended to happen?

In his Jan. 2017 report presented to the U.S. Congress, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), analyzing the high risks in Afghanistan, wrote: “Afghanistan needs a stable security environment to prevent it from again becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda or other terrorists. More than half of all U.S. reconstruction dollars since 2002 have gone toward building, equipping, training, and sustain-

2. “Afghan civilian casualties at record high in 2016: UN,” *Al Jazeera*, Feb. 6, 2017.



ing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). However, the ANDSF has not yet been capable of securing all of Afghanistan, and has lost territory to the insurgency. As of Aug. 28, 2016, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) reported that only 63.4% of the country's districts were under Afghan government control or influence, a reduction from the 72% as of Nov. 27, 2015." In fact, the Taliban controls more of the country now, than at any time since U.S. troops invaded in late 2001.

What was behind this failure? Is it because no one knew what was going on, or because some like Obama, and a few of his generals and CIA officials, believed that the United States and NATO can kill their way to subjugate the Afghans? Was that it?

### Stuffing a Sink-Hole with Money

What is certain, however, is that there was no dearth of money going into the huge Afghan sink-hole created by the Bush and Obama administrations. During these sixteen years of war-for-war's-sake in Afghanistan, U.S. taxpayers threw in close to \$800 billion, of which more than \$600 billion was burned up during the 2009-2016 period. This amount also includes Coalition Support Funds for Pakistan. The U.S. Department of Defense describes the role of Coalition Support Funds as reimbursement for "expenses Pakistan incurs to conduct operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces including providing logistical support for its forces, manning observation posts along the Afghanistan border, and conducting maritime interdiction operations and combat air patrols."<sup>3</sup> That reimbursement adds up to about \$15 billion.

In fact, the true cost of the Afghan war, like all other wars, was much more. Obama has dished out a few billions here, a few billions there to keep Pakistan as an ally in order to carry on his war-for-war's sake in Afghanistan. Much more importantly, this war has created thousands of injured veterans whom the American tax-



DoD photo/Staff Sgt. Kailly Brown, U.S. Army.

*An Afghan National Army first sergeant on a patrol through a poppy field in Afghanistan, May 9, 2013.*

payers are obligated to take care of. When one adds up those expenses, we are staring at another trillion dollars over the years.

But that is not all the killings for which Obama can be credited. Another major killer that made its deadly appearance in the United States and elsewhere during the eight years of Obama, remains in the background, but it is as real as ever. It is the killing of even those younger than the soldiers, by opioids. Throughout Obama's reign in Washington, the Afghan poppy fields continued to bloom even more vigorously. Opium production spread almost throughout the country. The year Obama took over, opium production in Afghanistan had come down from its peak of 7,400 tons in 2007, to 4,000 tons in 2009. Since then, however, it has been rising again, and the 2016 production could be as high as that in 2007.

### Heroin, the Silent Killer

Between 2004 and 2009, as opium production jumped upwards, the Bush Administration decided to help with manual eradication. Some central Afghan units were trained by the U.S. contractor Dyncorp, as well as by regional governors and their forces—but the effort was not really designed to eradicate opium completely and hurt the cash-short big universal banks like HSBC, which launder the money. It was more of a jobs plan, and putting up a show for those who were concerned about the opium explosion. This futile effort

3. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense: Comptroller, *Overseas Contingency Operations, Operations and Maintenance, Defense-Wide*, 2015.

saw about \$7.6 billion salted away to make a few very rich, but, as expected, nothing else changed. In 2009, the Obama administration officially recognized that opium eradication had been a failure, and abandoned it altogether.

The claim by the Obama Administration that opium production was only helping the Taliban was never true. It helped the bankers who backed Obama for all eight years of his administration. It also created thousands of tons of heroin that affected young people across the world. As long as the Afghan heroin was moving north to affect millions of youths in Russia and Central Asia, Americans had no problem accepting the deceptions of the Obama Administration.

But things have changed in recent years. Now Americans have no choice but to be aware of the threat posed by heroin and other opioids. The monster that had caused such havoc elsewhere, is now killing off and debilitating young and not-so-young people right here in the United States. “In 2015, more than 52,000 Americans died of drug overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That is an average of one death every ten minutes. Approximately 33,000 of these fatal overdoses—nearly two-thirds of them—were from opi-



creative commons

*A Taliban fighter.*

oids, including prescription painkillers and heroin. Although the absolute death toll from opioids is greatest in big cities like Chicago and Baltimore, the devastation is most concentrated in rural Appalachia, New England, and the Midwest. Many of the victims hail from white middle-class suburbs and rural towns.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Surge to Kill

On Dec. 1, 2009, Obama, speaking at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, declared a surge in the U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan, and set the goal of “disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al-Qaeda and its extremist allies.” On that occasion, he said: “Afghanistan is not lost, but for several years it has moved backwards. There’s no imminent threat of the government being overthrown, but the Taliban has gained momentum. Al-Qaeda has not re-emerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11, but they retain their safe havens along the border. And our forces lack the full support they need to effectively train and partner with Afghan security forces and better secure the population. Our

4. “America’s Opioid Epidemic is Worsening,” *The Economist*, Mar. 6, 2017.



DoD photo/Lance Cpl. Justin M. Mason, U.S. Marine Corps

*U.S. Marines patrol on foot in Surobi, Afghanistan, May 23, 2004.*





Al-Arabiya News Channel

*Afghan Taliban fighters.*

new commander in Afghanistan—General McChrystal—has reported that the security situation is more serious than he anticipated.” Obama said: “In short: The status quo is not sustainable,” and following a full review, “as Commander-in-Chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After eighteen months, our troops will begin to come home.” At that time there were already 70,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Obama said that the additional 30,000 troops would tilt the situation in such a way that United States would be able to stabilize Afghanistan in eighteen months, after which the U.S. troops would start coming home. This observation was either based upon a supreme level of ignorance, or it was yet another deception with the intent to kill some more. What followed under his top Afghanistan war commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal, suggests that the latter was what was intended. In June 2010, Obama fired McChrystal, who was losing control of his troops. But Obama’s killings continued under McChrystal’s successor, Gen. David Petraeus.

American troop casualty figures in 2008 show there were 155 deaths. They shot up to 317 in 2009; 499 in 2010; 418 in

2011; and 312 in 2012, before Obama found his drones and the death figures began climbing down. In those years Afghan civilian casualties also rose sharply. According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 2,412 civilians were killed by the war in 2009, a jump of 14% over the number that lost their lives in 2008. An additional 3,566 Afghan civilians were wounded as a result of the war in 2009. UNAMA attributed two-thirds of the deaths to the action of anti-government forces.

In 2010, one of the deadliest years, UNAMA and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported the deaths of 2,777 Afghan civilians, a jump of 15% over the civilian toll in 2009. Of these, UNAMA/AIHRC attributed 2,080 civilian deaths to insurgents, of which 55% were caused by suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)

In 2011, the United Nations reported that the civilian death toll numbered 3,021, a record high. In addition, 4,507 Afghans were wounded. The first half of 2011 was particularly deadly. 1,462 Afghan civilians were reportedly killed in the first six months of 2011, another 15% jump over the same period in 2010.



allpakistannews.com

*Eight killed in U.S. drone attack in Pakistan in 2010.*



U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. Lorie Jewell

U.S. Army Gen. David H. Petraeus with Senator Barack Obama, on a tour of the Middle East and Europe, at Baghdad International Airport, Iraq, July 21, 2008.

## Targeted Killings

In addition to the purposeless killing of the Afghans who opposed the Washington-directed government that alienated most Afghans, Obama and Petraeus went big with targeted killings. In a 2013 report, the London *Guardian* detailed the discussion of “kill lists” in the White House situation room with Obama in the chair. “Since the Obama Administration largely shut down the CIA’s rendition program, choosing instead to dispose of its enemies in drone attacks, those individuals who are being nominated for killing have been discussed at a weekly counter-terrorism meeting at the White House situation room that has become known as Terror Tuesday. Barack Obama, in the chair and wishing to be seen as a restraining influence, agrees to the final schedule of names. Once details of these meetings began to emerge, it was not long before the media began talking of ‘kill lists.’ More double-speak was required, it seemed, and before long the term ‘disposition matrix’ was born.”<sup>5</sup> The disposition matrix “is a sophisticated grid, mounted upon a database that is said to have been more than two years in the development, containing biographies of individuals believed to pose a threat to U.S. interests, and their known or suspected locations, as well as a range of

options for their disposal,” *Guardian* writer Ian Cobain explained.

On Sept. 2, 2010, the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), a combination of NATO and U.S. troops, announced that “‘coalition forces’ had killed the Taliban deputy shadow governor of Takhar who was also a ‘senior member’ of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in an air attack. Immediately, Afghans, including the provincial governor, police chief, and President Karzai insisted an egregious mistake had been made, and civilians who had been campaigning in Afghanistan’s parliamentary elections had been targeted. Ten were killed and seven injured.”<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently, an investigation was launched at the behest of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Kate Clark, analyzing the findings of this investigation, pointed out

that “targeted killings—as one element of the so-called ‘kill or capture’ strategy—are one of the main metrics of success claimed by General Petraeus and an ever more important aspect of international military policy in Afghanistan. These operations are, in Petraeus’s words, ‘intelligence driven’. Yet, on the very day of the Takhar attack, he had voiced concerns to journalists about flaws in U.S. intelligence operations, in particular their lack of a ‘granular understanding of local circumstances’.”<sup>7</sup>

The Takhar incident was an outcome of the *modus operandi* adopted by Obama and his generals, particularly Gen. Petraeus. Afghanistan became the petri dish where the CIA and the Special Operations Forces (SOF) were combined to form a lethal, unaccountable paramilitary force which carried out their agenda outside of any overall military plan. “The vision floated in Washington this week was of an expanded and collaborative role for the SOF and CIA, as conventional forces withdraw. Admiral McRaven, a rising star since his Navy Seals killed Osama bin Laden in 2011, said that the Pentagon was considering handing more of the Afghan war responsibility over to a senior special operations officer and, in the same articles, it was said that an ap-

5. Ian Cobain, “Obama’s Secret Kill List—The Disposition Matrix,” *The Guardian*, July 14 2013.

6. Kate Clark, *The Takhar Attack*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, May 2011.

7. See footnote 6.





U.S. Army photo/Sgt. 1st Class Joe Belcher.

*Members of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan move through Torkham, Afghanistan with the 19th Special Forces Group, returning from a border meeting with Pakistani security officials, Feb. 10, 2004.*

pointment was expected in the summer.”<sup>8</sup>

The involvement of the CIA and SOF in carrying out killings beyond the knowledge of the U.S. military sent out to “tame” the Taliban and eliminate al-Qaeda, raises questions. The CIA and SOF acted together in two areas: the CIA’s operation of drones for targeting and killing and, along with the SOF, its potential command responsibilities over certain irregular Afghan armed groups.

As Clark pointed out, it is important to distinguish between civilians and the military. “The military helps protect civilians and encourages states to only grant the power to kill to trained military personnel with a transparent chain of command. All U.S. military personnel undergo training in the laws of armed conflict. All of those deploying to Afghanistan, get special training on preventing civilian casualties. The law is evident in military codes of conduct, training manuals, legal handbooks and some of the tactical directives. We do not know what training CIA agents might have before they use drones or work with Afghan armed groups. This very lack of transparency encourages breaches of the law and unaccounted-for killings.”<sup>9</sup>

8. Kate Clark, *War Without Accountability: The CIA, Special Forces and Plans for Afghanistan’s Future*, Feb. 10, 2012.

9. See footnote 8.

## Paramilitary Forces

By bringing the CIA and SOF into Afghanistan to carry out targeted killings, Obama also widened the fissures within Afghanistan. For instance, in October 2009, the *New York Times* said that Ahmed Wali Karzai, the brother of the Afghan president, was drawn into this network by the Obama Administration.

The ties to Mr. Karzai have created deep divisions within the Obama Administration. The critics say the ties complicate America’s increasingly tense relationship with President Hamid Karzai, who has struggled to build sustained popularity among Afghans and has long been portrayed by the Taliban as an American puppet. The CIA’s practices

also suggest that the United States is not doing everything in its power to stamp out the lucrative Afghan drug trade, a major source of revenue for the Taliban.<sup>10</sup>

The article unveiled other operations that the Obama Administration was carrying out. It reported that Ahmed Wali Karzai was helping the CIA operate a paramilitary group, the Kandahar Strike Force (KSF). The KSF “is used for raids against suspected insurgents and terrorists. On at least one occasion, the strike force has been accused of mounting an unauthorized operation against an official of the Afghan government, the officials said.”

The existence of the KSF, as well as the Afghan Guard Force, may be a secret in the United States, but not in Afghanistan. “Jules Cavendish of *The Independent*, who has doggedly followed such groups, has interviewed senior figures within the KSF, including their former leader, Atal Afghanzai. He described how KSF recruits were cherry-picked from regular Afghan army units and trained by U.S. SOF at Mullah Omar’s old house, now known as Camp Gecko.”<sup>11</sup>

10. Dexter Filkins, Mark Mazzetti and James Risen, “Brother of Afghan Leader Said to Be Paid by C.I.A.,” *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2009.

11. See footnote 8.

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