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A Bad Vietnam Lesson for Afghanistan

By Douglas Valentine

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It just had to happen. And I just had to laugh.

On Sept. 3, *The New York Times* gave Mark Moyar, a professor of national security affairs at the United States Marine Corps University, space on its Op-Ed page to distort and revise history.

In his piece, "[Can the U.S. Lead Afghans?](#)," Moyar offers several suggestions for more successfully prosecuting the war in Afghanistan. "First," he says, "the United States must pressure senior Afghan leaders to weed out bad commanders. Second, we must assign more and better officers to advise Afghan units. Third, American units should work more closely with Afghan units."

However, Moyar doesn't believe that those steps alone will be enough. "Given what is at stake," Moyar says, "the United States should also consider more drastic techniques," such as "direct control over selecting commanders, a model that the United States used to excellent effect in Vietnam with the Provincial Reconnaissance Units, paramilitary forces that proved successful against the Vietcong."

With his characterization of the PRU (apart from his use of the word "drastic," which he employs without irony), Moyar is falsifying history by glossing over a dark chapter on the PRU and the counterinsurgency theories that gave birth to it.

Origins of 'Counter-Terror'

Government terror teams are nothing new. My father-in-law, Andy McKevitt, who is 98 years old, remembers British soldiers leaving their barracks at night, dressing as civilians, and murdering IRA leaders.

The Brits would gather the wives and children of missing IRA leaders in the barn and burn it down, shooting anyone who ran outside to escape the flames. The idea was to send a message to the community at large – support the IRA and you're horribly dead.

All the CIA did in Vietnam was to formalize this venerable practice, and give its terror teams a cutesy name: Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU).

Three CIA officers were instrumental in developing the PRU in South Vietnam. The first, Edward Lansdale, managed a successful anti-communist counterinsurgency in the Philippines in the early 1950s.

His innovation was using "combat psywar" tactics to exploit the religious beliefs and superstitions of the Filipinos. In one case designed to terrorize the local people into supporting the government against the communists (Huks), Lansdale sent in a combat psywar team to plant stories among town residents that a vampire lived on the hill where the Huks were based.

In his 1972 memoir, *In the Midst of War*, Lansdale wrote:

"Two nights later, after giving the stories time to circulate among Huk sympathizers in the town and make their way up to the hill camp, the psywar squad set up an ambush along a trail used by the Huks.

"When a Huk patrol came along the trail, the ambushers silently snatched the last man of the patrol, their move unseen in the dark night. They punctured his neck with two holes, vampire fashion, held the body up by the heels, drained it of blood, and put the corpse back on the trail.

"When the Huks returned to look for the missing man and found their bloodless comrade, every member of the patrol believed that the vampire had got him and that one of them would be next if they remained on the hill. When daylight came, the whole Huk squadron moved out of the vicinity."¹

Former advertising executive Lansdale used language to construct a squeaky-clean, Boy Scout image in the U.S., behind which he masked a perverse delight in atrocity. He defined the above incident as "low humor" and "an appropriate response ... to the glum and deadly practices of communists and other authoritarians."²

Lansdale's combat psywar operations relied on other forms of terror. In the Philippines, his teams would creep into town and paint an eye (copied from the Egyptian eye that appears atop the pyramid in the Great Seal of the United States) on a wall facing the house of each suspect.

As Lansdale writes, "The mysterious presence of these malevolent eyes the next morning had a sharply sobering effect."³

In South Vietnam, Lansdale's Eye of God trick would take a ghastly twist. CIA officer Pat McGarvey told Seymour Hersh that "some psychological warfare guy in Washington thought of a way to scare the hell out of villagers. When we [by which he meant counter-terror teams composed of Americans] killed a VC there, they wanted us to spread eagle the guy, put out

his eye, cut a hole in the back [of his head] and put his eye in there. The idea was that fear was a good weapon."4

As one American counter-terrorist told me, "We left our calling card nailed to the forehead of the corpses we left behind. They were playing card size with a light green skull with red eyes and red teeth dripping blood, set against a black background. We hammered them into the third eye, the pituitary gland, with our pistol butts. The third eye is the seat of consciousness for Buddhists, and this was a form of mutilation that had a powerful psychological effect."

The purpose of terror tactics like these is to drive people into a state of infantile dependence on the authority they fear. CIA psywar spells are also meant to fracture a society into opposing factions and project their repressed homicidal impulses onto the "Other." This is what happened after 9/11 – and is continuing today with the wild conspiracy theories of Fox News' Glenn Beck.

Lansdale's Leadership Programs

In Saigon starting in 1954, while posing as an Air Force colonel, CIA officer Lansdale imported the Filipinos to train South Vietnamese paramilitary units to operate in North Vietnam.

Posing as refugee relief organizations, the paramilitary teams activated stay-behind nets, sabotaged power plants, and spread false rumors ("black propaganda") that the communists were disemboweling pregnant Catholic women, castrating priests, and sticking bamboo slivers in the ears of children so they could not hear the Word of God.

Lansdale also used Freedom Company to activate Operation Brotherhood, a paramedical team patterned on the typical Special Forces A-team. Under CIA direction, Operation Brotherhood cadre built dispensaries that were used as cover for Filipino killers who, while building roads and dispensing medicines, identified and murdered Vietminh stay-behind agents organizing secret cells and conducting propaganda in the South.

Lansdale initially employed Filipinos because he had difficulty finding Vietnamese willing to terrorize their own people. But there weren't enough Filipino mercenaries to fight the war, so Lansdale turned to Vietnamese Catholics who had been relocated from the North after the partition in 1954. The CIA resettled them in enclaves around South Vietnam, and set them against the Buddhists.

Lansdale also used Catholic refugees as cadre for his "Civic Action" program, the centerpiece of the South's national security program. Organized and funded by the CIA (as were Moyer's vaunted PRU), Civic Action aimed to do four things: induce enemy soldiers to defect; organize rural people into self-defense forces; create political cadres to sell the idea that the CIA's handpicked Catholics puppets represented national aspirations; and provide cover for counter-terror.

Civic Action cadres dressed in black pajamas and went into villages to dig latrines, patch roofs, dispense medicines, and deliver propaganda composed by Lansdale. In return the people were expected to inform on Vietminh guerrillas and vote for the CIA's candidate.

However, the middle-class northern Catholics did not speak the same dialects as the rural people they were teaching, and succeeded only in alienating them. Not only did Civic Action fail to win the hearts and minds of the rural Vietnamese, but as a unilateral CIA operation it received only lip service from the CIA puppets in the South Vietnamese government, who, in Lansdale's words, "were afraid that it was some scheme of mine to flood the country with secret agents."⁵

Lansdale tried to build from the top down a Vietnam infused with American values and dollars, while Vietnamese nationalists built slowly from the ground up, on a foundation they had laid over 40 years.

Mark Moyer is urging America to embark on a course in Afghanistan by resurrecting Lansdale's old strategy.

Counter-Terror Teams

I got my introduction to the PRU program in 1984 when I interviewed William Colby. For background on the Phoenix Program, Colby referred me to Ralph Johnson's thesis, *The Phoenix Program: Planned Assassination or Legitimate Conflict Management*, at American University.

The origin of the CIA's counter-terror doctrine in South Vietnam may be traced, in part, to political warfare pioneer Johnson, who dubbed his terror doctrine "Contre Coup." In his thesis he openly describes Contre Coup as, "Turning the Communist terrorist strategy, which had proven effective, into a US-Saigon pacification strategy."

A Chicago native, veteran of the Flying Tigers and notorious ladies' man (whose most famous liaison was with Nguyen Cao Ky's wife), Johnson served the CIA first in the Philippines, then Indonesia, and then northern Laos where, working undercover for the "humanitarian" Agency for International Development, he secretly organized Montagnard tribesmen and Pathet Lao defectors into clandestine commando teams.

In mid-1960, Johnson was transferred to Hue to serve as the CIA officer in charge of South Vietnam's northern provinces, and to implement a program like the one he had created in Laos. While in the Philippines, Johnson had observed how Lansdale used Civic Action as a cover for recruiting agents and killing people.

He learned from Lansdale's failures, and realized that Vietnamese (apart from Catholics, or ambitious and politically indoctrinated military and security forces) were unlikely to terrorize their own people.

Thus, Johnson focused on recruiting his killers from hill tribes, which had a long history of being oppressed by the Vietnamese and were strategically situated along Vietnam's borders.

In staffing the officer corps for the pilot hill tribe programs he created, Johnson spotted, vetted, and hired suitably sociopathic military, security and police officers. These South Vietnamese nationals were detached from their parent agencies and served at the pleasure of the local civilian authorities, who were handsomely bribed by the CIA. These are the prototypes of the people Mark Moyer is recommending "we" turn to in Afghanistan.

According to Stu Methven, a CIA paramilitary officer who followed Johnson from Laos to Hue in early 1961, the Mountain Scouts were a unilateral CIA operation managed by CIA-funded province and district chiefs.

The scouts were composed of Montagnard tribesmen recruited by Vietnamese agents in the CIA's employ. The "Yards" and their Vietnamese officers were organized into fifteen-man teams that had both paramilitary and political action capabilities. Their job, says Methven, was to "make the GVN presence felt outside the district capitals."

Once inside a VC village, the Mountain Scout political officer would denounce the communists and make a pro-GVN speech, co-written by Johnson and his South Vietnamese counterpart. Other team members would take a census and make a map of the village.

If possible, the team returned with defectors, left informers behind, and stuck a VC head on a pole as they left. The latter was the counter-terror psywar function, distinct from any strictly paramilitary function, which involved combat with enemy units.

Methven co-managed the Mountain Scout program with Johnson until 1962. To counter what he perceived as rampant VC terror, Methven then began extracting the most aggressive individuals from Mountain Scout teams, and placing them with convicts and Chinese Nungs, to perform gruesome counter-terror psywar function.

These counter-terror (CT) teams, as they were named, were the basis for Moyar's PRU.

Indoctrination

Johnson and Methven were not the only CIA officers experimenting with terror as psywar.

CIA officer Frank Scotton, working under U.S. Information Service cover, developed in the early 1960s a "motivational indoctrination program" to incorporate normal Vietnamese within CIA counter-terror and political action teams. The trick was to make these normal Vietnamese believe they were "special."

To enhance this *esprit de corps*, Scotton's counter-terror and political action teams were better equipped and better paid than regular army units. Carbines were replaced with submachine guns, and instead of wearing uniforms, the cadres wore black pajamas.

Scotton's teams were also "special" insofar as they reported directly to the province security chief, who was always an agent of the CIA.

Scotton worked with Vietnamese first in the northern province of Quang Ngai and in the critical districts around Saigon. He named his special units the *Trung-doi biet kich Nham dou* (people's commando teams).

"Two functions split out of this," Scotton told me. "First was pacification. Second was the anti-VCI function taken out to form the Provincial Reconnaissance Units. The PRU thing directly evolves from this."

(The VCI is CIA lingo for Viet Cong Infrastructure. According to official U.S. policy, the VCI were communist members of the Lao Dong Party – the civilian political and

administrative leaders of the National Liberation Front and People's Revolutionary Government, as well as their security and guerrilla forces. In fact, the VCI encompassed anyone not actively in support of the U.S. and its puppet regime in Saigon.)

In 1964 CIA Station Chief in Saigon, Peer DeSilva, decided to formalize the ideas developed simultaneously by Johnson and Scotton into a nationwide strategy for pacifying South Vietnam.

The idea, DeSilva said in his autobiography, was "to bring danger and death to the Vietcong functionaries themselves, especially in the areas where they felt secure. We had obtained descriptions and photographs of known cadres who were functioning as committee chiefs, recruiters, province representatives and heads of raiding parties.

"Based on these photographs and their known areas of operation, we had recruited really tough groups of individuals, organized in teams of three or four, who were willing and able by virtue of prior residence to go into the areas in which we knew the Vietcong senior cadres were active and to see what could be done to eliminate them."6

Again, this is the model that Moyer apparently wants the U.S. to follow in Afghanistan.

DeSilva gave the job to his chief of Covert Action, Tom Donohue. A product and practitioner of Cook County politics, Donohue joined the CIA when he perceived the Cold War as "a growth industry."

When we met in 1986, Donohue was working as the Mideast representative for a Filipino construction company. When he arrived in Saigon in 1964, Donohue worked under State Department cover in the embassy's political office.

Donohue bought a parcel of land at Vung Tau and built a CIA-owned and managed facility to train counter-terrorists and political action teams for national distribution.

By 1965, Donohue noted, "We got to the point where the CIA was running a political program in a sovereign country where they didn't know what the hell we were teaching. What kind of program could it be that had only one sponsor, the CIA that says it was doing good? It had to be sinister. Any red-blooded American could understand that. What the hell is the CIA doing running a program on political action?

"So I went out to try to get some co-sponsors for the record. They weren't easy to come by. I went to [USIS chief] Barry Zorthian. I said, 'Barry, how about giving us someone?' I talked to MACV about getting an officer assigned. I had AID give me a guy."

But all of it, Donohue said, "was window-dressing. We [the CIA] had the funds; we had the logistics; we had the transportation."

As the war geared up, Donohue supplemented his CIA cadre with U.S. Special Forces and Australians. By 1965 the program, named Revolutionary Development (RD), was up and running.

At the core were counter-terror and the 59-man RD teams, composed of three eleven-man teams constituting an "action element" (with a counter-terror mission); a six-man Civic

Action team; a six-man "mobile" Census Grievance team under the intelligence office; and a six-man economic unit.

RD was the new improved manifestation of the Lansdale combat psywar model of disguising terrorists within civic action teams. Indeed, in 1965, Ed Lansdale was resurrected and assigned as liaison to the CIA's RD Program.

It is important to remember that CIA counter-terror teams had no legal authority. In South Vietnam, the national police alone had the authority to arrest and detain.

As Colonel "Pappy" Gieves, the top American advisor to the Field Police, said about the situation: "We used to send Field Police squads and platoons down to Vung Tau for RD training, which was political indoctrination, and for PRU training, which was raids and ambushes.

"The RD Cadre were patterned on the Communists' political cadre, and they paralleled the civilian government. But most were city boys who went out to the villages and just talked to the girls. On the other hand, the Vietcong had been training since they were 12. So the CIA was trying to do in 12 weeks what the Communists did in six years."

Similarly, Moyar and the CIA are hoping to do in Afghanistan in a few weeks what the Taliban has been doing for years.

The Name Game

A big problem in South Vietnam, as in Afghanistan, is that the CIA defines its enemy as "insurgents" when in fact they are nationalists. Thus, it is counterproductive for political action and counter-terror teams to hunt them down in their own villages.

In South Vietnam many American targets were not terrorists but, as counter-insurgency guru David Galula writes, "men whose motivations, even if the counterinsurgent disapproves of them, may be perfectly honorable. They do not participate directly, as a rule, in direct terrorism or guerrilla action and, technically, have no blood on their hands."⁷

Collecting intelligence on these Robin Hoods meant recruiting agents and informants.

But, as erstwhile CIA officer and Phoenix advisor Warren Milberg noted in his 1974 thesis, "The Future Applicability of the Phoenix Program," written for the Air University, recruiting informants and agents in enemy territory was dangerous work, so "it became necessary to do detailed studies of various motivational factors."

Consequently, the CT teams focused on recruiting "people who had been victims of Viet Cong atrocities and acts of terrorism."⁸

In the Philippines, Lansdale boasted about training some troops "to pose as a Huk squadron in enemy-controlled areas."⁹ David Galula agreed this is an effective tactic, saying, "pseudo insurgents are another way to get intelligence and to sow suspicion at the same time between the real guerrillas and the population."¹⁰

Thus, CIA counter-terror teams started pretending to be VC and terrorizing friendly as well as enemy villages.

This counter-terror “intelligence function” (it’s an intelligence function because, by producing informants and agents, it produces intelligence) was well known by October 1965, when Ohio Sen. Stephen Young charged that the CIA’s CTs disguised themselves as Vietcong and discredited the Communists by committing atrocities.

"It was alleged to me that several of them executed two village leaders and raped some women," the *Herald Tribune* reported Young as saying.”¹¹

The scandal generated by Young had only effect – to prompt the CIA in 1966 to change the name of its counter-terror teams to the PRU, which, in 1967, became one of three foundation stones (along with the CIA’s interrogation and administrative detention programs) of the CIA’s infamous Phoenix Program.

Phoenix and the PRU

Under the CIA’s Phoenix Program, the PRU were charged with obtaining intelligence inside enemy villages, while the Special Branch focused on secure areas. Oftentimes the operations overlapped, but in every case, when the evidence indicated that a suspect was an enemy agent, the person was targeted for recruitment in place.

The ultimate object of intelligence operations was to recruit an agent in place.

"You didn't send out the PRU right away," CIA officer Jim Ward told me. "First you had to figure out if you could get access to him and if you could communicate with him once you had a relationship. Everybody in the Far East operates primarily by family, so the only opportunity of getting something like that would be through relatives who were accessible people.

“Does he have a sister or wife in town that we can have access to? A brother? Somebody who can reach him? Somebody he can trust? If that could be arranged, then you looked for a weakness to exploit.

“Is there any reason to believe he's been in this position for five years and hasn't been promoted when everybody else around him has been moving up the ladder? Does he bear resentment? Anything you can find by way of vulnerability that would indicate this guy might be amenable to persuasion to work for us."

Ward, like most CIA officers, preferred to rely on the PRU, which were totally under CIA control, rather than the Special Branch.

Ward put it this way: "To get a guy in enemy territory, you've got to get an armed intelligence collection unit where the guy's got the balls to go into an area to perform the mission. You're not going to get police officers who are walking a beat in town or the Special Branch guy who deals with agents. Generally, the PRU is the outfit that's best equipped."

Bribes, sex, blackmail, and drugs all were legitimate means of recruitment.

The ultimate target was communist military command structure, but as Phoenix Program creator Nelson Brickham said, "These things for the most part were low-grade, but occasionally we had some people on the payroll as penetration agents who worked at district level, and as I recall, we had three or four at province level, which is fairly high up."

According to Ralph Johnson, the PRU were statistically proven to be the most effective action arm against the VCI, or "Viet Cong Infrastructure." The 1966 Combined Campaign Plan noted that the PRU were "by far the most effective and suffered the lowest casualties," and that "the type of target attacked by the PRU was strategically most significant."¹²

A problem, however, was that, as a unilateral CIA program, the PRU operated outside the law.

The PRU in Danang

In 1965, South Vietnam's national security chief, Nguyen Cao Ky, sold the CIA the right to organize counter-terror and political action franchises in the provinces.

At this point, with only nine cadres, one of whom was Phu Van Tran (PVT), CIA officer Rudy Enders formed III Corps's original counter-terror team in Bien Hoa. A fast friendship formed between Enders and PVT (Enders married his sister), and when Enders was reassigned to I Corps as the CIA's chief paramilitary adviser, PVT tagged along and helped manage the region's PRU, RD Cadre, Special Branch, and Phoenix programs.

The CIA officer in charge of Hue in February 1968 was William Melton, "an older man," according to Phu Van Tran, "hard and mean," who was angered over the death of his PRU adviser.

While the battle for Hue was raging, Enders came down from Da Nang to lend Melton a hand. After a quick look around Enders decided to go after "the VCI who had surfaced at Tet. We had troop density," Enders explained to me, "and we had all these Phoenix files, so now we grab hold."

In order actually to "grab hold" of the VCI operating in Hue, Rudy Enders brought PVT down from Da Nang to interrogate VCI prisoners. As PVT told me, he and "a small team of five or six people" crossed the Perfume River into Hue and went directly to the CIA interrogation center, where "Rudy left me in charge."

PVT and his team then interrogated the captured Communists and "took photos and fingerprints and made blacklists." The PRU then went out and killed everyone on the CIA blacklists.

Army Lieutenant Jerry Bishop served in the Da Nang City Phoenix Program from July 1968 until March 1970. He served as CIA officer Roger Mackin's deputy in the Da Nang City Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center.

Bishop notes that CIA officer Enders formed the Da Nang City PRU in 1968 as a means of providing PVT with a draft deferment and steady employment – a fact that underscores the futility of thinking that CIA selection of Afghan unit commanders, as Moyar suggests, will somehow eliminate patronage.

Working undercover in the CIA motor pool, the Da Nang City PRU specialized in deep-penetration operations into the jungle area in the districts outside Da Nang where the ARVN feared to go.

But the Da Nang City PRU were controversial. They were the only PRU team assigned to a city in all Vietnam, and did not have the approbation of Captain Pham Van Liem, the Quang Nam PRU chief, or of Major Nguyen Van Lang, the national PRU commander, who made his living selling "PRU-ships" and resented the fact that PVT had gotten his job for free.

When Bishop arrived in Da Nang, CIA officer Mackin (under cover as an army major) was embroiled in a dispute with Police Chief Nguyen Minh Tan over the mere presence of the PRU in Da Nang.

Thus, while Enders was home on leave, Tan transferred PVT to another province. When Enders returned to Da Nang, he brought PVT back; Tan was summarily transferred to the Central Phung Hoang Permanent Office in Saigon.

Bishop, as deputy Phoenix coordinator, coordinated the various Vietnamese intelligence agencies in Da Nang. His top priority was collecting data on VCI infiltrators living in the shantytowns on the outskirts of the city. He did this by reading translated Special Branch reports provided by Dick Ledford, the senior CIA Special Branch adviser headquartered at the Da Nang Interrogation Center.

Ledford used Bishop to interrogate high-level VCI prisoners, whom Bishop would isolate and humiliate in order to make them lose face with other prisoners, on the theory that breaking a man's spirit was the quickest way to get him to talk, like the Bush era's reliance on torture to achieve "learned helplessness."

In hard cases Bishop administered drugs to disorient his prisoners, then offered a return to sanity in exchange for information.

Hearings

In 1969 the Phoenix Program was revealed, at which point the American public demanded an explanation, leading the Senate to hold hearings in 1970.

On one side were senators who, on faith, accepted the CIA's word that Phoenix was part of an overall strategy to protect the retreating American army – hardly something a patriot could fault.

These senators used the hearings to praise Phoenix as it was defined by William Colby and his hand-picked entourage of politically indoctrinated apparatchiks. After defining Phoenix as moral, "popular," and legal, Colby took questions from the senators, only one of whom tried to get at the truth.

Tennessee Senator Albert Gore asked Colby to explain "the difference between the Vietcong terror efforts against the political infrastructure of the Saigon government, on the one hand, and the counter-terror program of the [GVN] against the political infrastructure of their opposition, the NLF."

Dodging the question, Colby said, "There is no longer a counter-terror effort." One had existed a few years earlier, for about "six months to a year," he said, but he had stopped it because they did "some unfortunate things."

After some verbal jousting, Gore asked Colby, "What were the goals of the Phoenix program when it was, by your terms, a counter-terror program?"

COLBY: "To capture, rally or kill members of the enemy apparatus."

GORE: "As I understand your answer, the goals are the same. You used identically the same words -- capture, rally or kill. I do not quite get either a distinction or a difference."

COLBY: "The difference ... was that at the time there were these special groups which were not included in the normal government structure. Since that time, this has been more and more integrated into the normal government structure, and correspondingly conducted under the government's rules of behavior. "

Was that true? No, but there were no dissenting voices. All the senators had to counter Colby were newspaper and magazine articles written by established reporters whose articles the CIA had carefully sanitized.

The New York Times did not explain that CT teams were disguising themselves as the enemy, and killing and terrorizing friendly allies, as the ultimate form of psywar.

The only article that got anywhere near reality was "The CIA's Hired Killers," by Georgie Anne Geyer, written for *True for Today's Man* (February 1970).

Calling the PRU "the best killers in Vietnam," Geyer compared them to terrorists, with the qualification that "our terror" was different from "their terror" in that "there was no real political organization -- no political ideology -- behind our terror. Their boys did it for faith; our boys did it for money."

Geyer's allegation that the CIA hired killers to commit terror cast a dark cloud over the hearings. She told how "[i]n the absence of an American or South Vietnamese ideology, it was said in the early days, why not borrow the most workable tenets of the enemy's. After all," she quoted Frank Scotton as saying, "they stole the atomic bomb secrets and all from us."

And so, Geyer writes, "Scotton and a few other Americans ... started a counter-guerrilla movement in northern Quang Ngai Province.... Terror and assassination were included in their bag of tricks. At one point, USIS printed 50,000 leaflets showing sinister black eyes. These were left on bodies after assassination or even -- 'our terrorists' are playful -- nailed to doors to make people think they were marked for future efforts.

"But," Geyer goes on, "whereas Scotton's original counter-guerrillas were both assassins in the night and goodwill organizers of the people, the PRUs are almost exclusively assassins in the night."

Their emphasis "of late," she writes, "has been ... to murder, kidnap, terrorize or otherwise forcibly eliminate the civilian leadership of the other side."

In one village "a VC tax collector will be assassinated in his bed in the night. In another, wanted posters will be put up for a VC leader, offering a reward to try to persuade his friends to turn him in. The PRU may also drop down from helicopters and terrorize whole villages, in the hope that they will be so frightened to deal with the VC in the future."

Furthermore, "the PRUs are excellent torturers.... Torture has now come to be so indiscriminately used that the VC warn their men to beware of any released prisoner if he has not been tortured. ...

"Sometimes we have to kill one suspect to get another to talk," Geyer quoted a CIA PRU adviser as saying. Another PRU adviser told her that "he ate supper with his PRUs on the hearts and livers of their slain enemies."

Another one said, "I've been doing this for 22 years all over the world." He cited Egypt when Nasser was coming to power and the Congo, "when we were trying to get rid of Tshombe."

Writes Geyer about the PRU adviser: "His job, like that of many Americans in South Vietnam, was terror." And she calls American PRU advisers "really the leaders," a view that contrasted with Colby's claim that Americans were limited to "advice and assistance."

In response to Geyer's article, Colby's friend John Vann said, "[T]here is always a tendency to report extremes.... But when those exceptions ... are used by people who are in basic disagreement with the policy in Vietnam as a means of criticizing the effort, they are taken out of context. They in no way reflect anything that is normal.""

Kentucky Sen. Sherman Cooper asked Vann, "Is the U.S. involved in any way in carrying out what can be called a "terrorist" activity?"

VANN: "Well, the answer very shortly, sir, is no, we do not."

Compare Vann's statement with that made by Charlie Yothers, the CIA's chief of operations in I Corps in 1970: "Sure we got involved in assassinations. That's what PRU were set up for - assassination. I'm sure the word never appeared in any outlines or policy directives, but what else do you call a targeted kill?"¹³

From Vietnam to El Salvador

Rudy Enders, the CIA's top paramilitary advisor in III Corps in 1971, worked under CIA Officer Donald Gregg. Ender's PRU advisor was Cuban exile Felix Rodriguez.

A tactic developed by Rodriguez would take defectors and prisoners up in a light observation helicopter to point out VCI hiding places on the ground. A PRU team would follow with the First Air Cav and the Phoenix Region Coordinator.

In 1983, Enders was chief of the CIA's Special Operations Division, and El Salvador had emerged as the perfect new place to apply CIA theories on low-intensity warfare.

Vice President George H.W. Bush's national security adviser, Donald Gregg, wrote to President Reagan's national security adviser saying, "Rudy Enders went to El Salvador in

1981 to do a survey and develop plans for effective anti-guerrilla operations. He came back and endorsed the attached plan."

The Pink Plan, written by former PRU adviser Felix Rodriguez, was to launch mobile air strikes with "minimum U.S. participation" at leftist rebels. Rodriguez said the plan would "Be ideal for the pacification effort in El Salvador and Guatemala."

Rodriguez was sent to El Salvador, where he led missions using the same techniques he had developed while serving as Gregg's deputy in charge of the PRU in Vietnam. As in Vietnam, guerrilla hideouts were bombed by U.S. warplanes, then ravaged in Phoenix-style cordon and search operations in which PRU-type teams hunted enemy cadres in their homes. Rodriguez played the role of coordinator.

General Paul Gorman, who commanded U.S. forces in Central America in the mid-1980's, defined this new type of counterinsurgency operation as "a form of warfare repugnant to Americans, a conflict which involves innocents, in which non-combatant casualties may be an explicit object."

Now, Mark Moyar recommends that the PRU inspire what the Obama administration should do in Afghanistan.

The Media

After I wrote my book, *The Phoenix Program*, the *Times* hired Vietnam-era reporter Morley Safer to slam it when it came out in 1990. Why?

I believe it was because I said: "The suppression of dissent in America was championed by the same people who advocated war in Vietnam. And when it became apparent that America had been defeated in Vietnam, these reactionaries -- like the Germans after World War I -- vented their bitterness and anger on the disparate groups that formed the antiwar movement.

"Using Phoenix 'offensive counterintelligence' tactics, the security forces in America splintered the antiwar movement into single-issue groups, which were isolated and suppressed during the backlash of the Reagan era. Today [that was in 1990!] the threat of terrorism alone remains, pounded into the national consciousness, at the bequest of big business, by abiding media.

"Indeed, without the complicity of the media, the government could not have implemented Phoenix, in Vietnam or America. A full disclosure of the Province Interrogation Centers and the Provincial Reconnaissance Units would have resulted in its demise. But the relationship between the media and the government is symbiotic, not adversarial.

"The extent to which this practice existed was revealed in 1975, when William Colby informed a congressional committee that more than 500 CIA officers were operating under cover as corporate executives and that 40 CIA officers were posing as journalists.

"When it comes to the CIA and the press, one hand washes the other. In order to have access to informed officials, reporters frequently suppress or distort stories. In return, officials leak stories to reporters to whom they owe favors.

“At its most incestuous, reporters and government officials are actually related—for example, Delta PRU chief, Navy Commander Charles Lemoyne and his *New York Times* reporter brother, James. Likewise, if Ed Lansdale had not had Joseph Alsop to print his black propaganda in the United States, there probably would have been no Vietnam War.

“In a democratic society the media ought to investigate and report objectively on the government, which is under no obligation to inform the public of its activities and which, when it does, puts a positive ‘spin’ on the news.

“As part of the deal, when those activities are conducted in secret, illegally, reporters tend to look away rather than jeopardize profitable relationships. The price of success is compromise of principles.

“This is invariably the case; the public is always the last to know, and what it does learn are at best half-truths, squeezed into five-hundred-word columns or thirty-second TV bites, themselves easily ignored or forgotten.

“So it was with Phoenix.”

And so it is with Mark Moyar, on the Op-Ed page of the *Times*, advocating the PRU -- a unilateral CIA terror operation that usurped Vietnamese sovereignty and perpetrated thousands of war crimes – as a model for how America can pacify Afghanistan.

Moyar’s distortions mark him as a shameless ideologue who promotes the military line regardless of the truth. And the same holds true for *The New York Times*, which marched him out as the expert without providing historical context.

The *Times* knows the truth about the PRU, as does Moyar. The public alone is deceived.