

**Nazis, Contras, Jihadists.**

## **About the Development of U.S. and NATO Special Warfare Doctrine**

By Dr. Nikolaus Brauns

Special warfare is a concept that was developed by the U.S. and the Washington-dominated NATO military alliance after World War II in face of the Cold War and decolonization. The goal was to fight socialist guerrillas and national liberation movements, to destabilize progressive anti-imperialist governments and to prevent further spread of communist influence.

Technically, it is about unconventional warfare - as distinct from conventional wars, which are fought between regular armies of nation-states.

In a manual for the special forces of the U.S. Army in 2008 is written regarding this "operations conducted by, with, or through irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, insurgency, or conventional military operations."<sup>1</sup>

Used by U.S. and NATO militaries since the 1960s the term counterinsurgency has been widely used as a synonym for special warfare.

Meant by that is a "mix of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to contain the insurgency while addressing its roots"<sup>2</sup> Where a revolutionary organization is established among the people "like the fish in the water" (Mao Zedong), the counterinsurgency primarily targets the "hearts and minds" of the population to isolate the insurgents.

The special war therefore consists of a combination of military and political means, including a strong psychological component. The central element, however, is violence in multiple forms. "Since World War II, assassinations, sabotage, kidnapping, torture, the overthrow of foreign governments, and other terrorist activities have formed an organic component of our national defense policy. This has been presented over and over again as a necessity to combat communist insurgencies and more recently terrorism - as the only effective response to the barbarism attributed or projected upon our enemies, if it's the Sandinistas or the PLO"<sup>3</sup> Michael McClintock writes in his 1992 published study of the Counterinsurgency Doctrine of the United States.

The U.S. learned the tactics and methods of unconventional warfare from its own experience in supporting partisan movements in the countries occupied by the Nazis and Japanese-occupied countries in World War II, from the experiences of its British and French allies in colonial wars such as in Algeria - and especially from the experiences of their former fascist opponents! "The American special war doctrine draws significantly on the methods of the 'Wehrmacht' and the SS in terrorizing the civilian population and, perhaps more importantly, involving local factions in combating partisan resistance,"<sup>4</sup> according to Michael McClintock.

Former officers of the Nazi 'Wehrmacht' and 'Waffen-SS' who entered American service after the war, who had themselves participated in mass shootings of civilians and village destruction as part of the fight against partisans in the Soviet Union, Italy and the Balkans, thus participated in the drafting of U.S. military manuals in which terrorist methods ranging from hostage taking to targeted assassinations were propagated for counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare. .

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1 US-Army Field Manual 3-05.130.

2 U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide, Januar 2009.

3 Michael McClintock: Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, Counterterrorism, 1940-1990, New York 1992.

4 McClintock, S.59.

The infrastructure for special warfare had already been established in 1952 with the opening of the Center for Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which was later named the Special Warfare Center. Until today Fort Bragg remains the central training facility for the special forces of the United States, its NATO-partners and other allies. From the 1960s onwards, training centers were established in the U.S. and also in the Philippines, Japan (Okinawa), Panama and Germany in which the U.S. military and CIA trained foreign partners in counterinsurgency. Infamous as a "torture school" was in particular the "US Army School of the Americas," opened in 1963 at Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal. Until 1984 U.S. instructors trained 45,000 Latin American officers and intelligence officers from 23 countries in counterinsurgency techniques. Among the graduates of this "school of dictators and torturers" have been coup generals such as Augusto Pinochet in Chile, dictators such as Panama's ruler Manuel Noriega, and leaders of death squads, such as General Roberto D'Aubuisson of El Salvador, whose killer assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Its longest-running special war launched the U.S. against Cuba in 1960. Targeted attacks on revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, assassinations of teachers during the literacy campaign, terrorist attacks on civilian aircraft and ships, and economic sabotage were elements of a low-intensity war coordinated by the CIA, which in its first years had already cost 3400 Cuban lives. However, a U.S.-backed mercenary invasion of the Bay of Pigs failed in April 1961 because of the rapid mobilization of the revolutionary armed forces on the one hand, but also because the Cuban population's lack of support for the invasion carried out by the former torturers, big landowners and mafia gangs. In recent decades, the United States especially used the economic blockade of the island, combined with financial support for marginal counterrevolutionary circles on Cuba itself and right-wing exile-Cuban contra forces in the U.S. and a massive propaganda war, for example with the Radio Marti, which broadcasts from Miami to Cuba.

The fact that Cuba maintains its socialist and anti-imperialist course until today shows at the same time the limitations of the strategic effectiveness of a special war against a politically enlightened, conscious and organized population under a revolutionary leadership.

The actual development of the special war doctrine began in the early 1960s under U.S. President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's special military advisor, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, later developed a strategic concept as chief of the United States Joint military staff for a "special war", before he was sent as U.S. ambassador to Saigon in 1964, to put this into practice in Vietnam. Taylor distinguished three forms of war, for which the U.S. had to prepare: nuclear world war, limited and local wars, and to special wars. The specificity of special wars was that the U.S. as the actual aggressor, did not employ its own combat units, but instead used native forces to both support allied regimes in counterinsurgency operations and to overthrow opposing regimes with U.S. advisors and material.

This was to save costs and keep the U.S. Army's blood toll low to avoid political opposition to war involvement at home. It was also intended to avoid a direct confrontation between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces with an incalculable potential for escalation. And finally, it was also a matter to cover up the appearance of foreign interference through the use of native forces to create legitimacy for the aggressors in the eyes of the local population. "'Special warfare' thus is only the military expression of neocolonialism - just as the Expeditionary Corps was the military expression of classical colonialism. While the latter, however, was based in part on the colonial powers' own military in combination with recruited colonial soldiers and such task forces as the French Foreign Legion, the Americans in the 'special war' supply the weapons and the dollars, the planes and the pilots, the strategic and tactical command - including 'advisory' officers down to the company level - in effect, everything except the 'gun fodder,'"<sup>5</sup> wrote Australian journalist Wilfred G. Burchett,

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5 Wilfried G. Burchett, *Partisanen kontra Generale*, Berlin/DDR 1965.

who had traveled to Vietnam in 1963 to report, embedded with the National Liberation Front "from the other side" about this first major field test for Taylor's Special Warfare Concept.

### Special Warfare in Indochina

Since 1961 U.S. special forces had already been conducting covert sabotage and assassination-operations against the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFB) in South Vietnam, in the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and in neighboring Laos. However, the decisive contribution in the fight against the guerrillas, according to a commission led by General Taylor and economist Walt Whitman Rostow, should have been performed by the troops of the South Vietnamese vassal regime under Ngo Dinh in Saigon. For this the U.S. sent tens of thousands of military advisors to South Vietnam. The CIA began in late 1961 to recruit members of the hill tribes in the South Vietnamese province of Darlac in so-called self-defense groups to fight against the Liberation Front and provided extensive resources to build counterrevolutionary special forces under the command of Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. These units conducted together with the secret police in Saigon subversive actions to discredit the Liberation Front, tracking down its alleged supporters and interrogated, tortured, and murdered them. The Taylor-Rostow mission also recognized the psychological component of successful counterinsurgency warfare. To expand the social base of the Diem regime, which ruled as a family dictatorship, the commission called for a program of limited social reforms, such as the cancellation of parts of the peasants' debts and improved schooling and medical care in the countryside. To cut ties with the guerrillas, the government in Saigon in August 1962, on the basis of a "Strategic Concept for the National Security Council of the U.S., ordered the resettlement of the rural population in so-called strategic villages. U.S. military advisors, CIA personnel and representatives of the civilian US foreign aid organizations had the authority to control the Forced Relocations. By October 1963, 8.7 million Vietnamese had already been resettled in over 7200 such settlements secured with barbed wire and mines, so that the Saigon regime already boasted that "all measures taken by the enemy of the nation have been blocked and the essentials of its organization have been shaken."

But the peasants, violently forced into the "strategic villages," put up increasingly fierce resistance. Supported by the guerrilla, uprisings broke out in numerous villages against Saigon's soldiers, who acted up as if they were "protectors." The Saigon Army, supported by U.S.-helicopters, proved itself unable to militarily pacify even one of the main regions militarily against the flexible guerrilla warfare which mostly kept initiative. Moreover, the regime with its class characteristic proved incapable of implementing even a minimal program of social reform. While protests in the cities increased, the number of deserters from the Saigon army rose sharply, and in many places the counterrevolutionary Special Forces dissolved. "The imperialist forces in no way admitted to themselves that the failure of their counterrevolutionary concept was following the same pattern as the strengthening of the NFB as a powerful organization, which consistently oriented to the development of the revolutionary struggle. They did not want to admit that the NFB was able to face a materially-technically far superior opponent also because its program repeatedly found the broad support of the Vietnamese population", states a study published by the GDR's military publisher on the failure of U.S. Special War as a Strategic Option in Indochina.<sup>6</sup>

With Kennedy's successor Lyndon B. Johnson, the U.S. started the "locally limited war" with the expansion of the war through large-scale air strikes on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and finally the massive deployment of U.S. soldiers. The high blood toll that the American conscripts had to pay was a major reason for the emergence of a broad anti-war movement in the U.S., which together with the sacrificial resistance of the Vietnamese people forced the U.S. to withdraw from Vietnam in 1973. After this temporary failure of the special war as a strategy, it found its revival

<sup>6</sup> Angelika Bator: USA-Politik gegen Asien: Strategische Grundzüge nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg, Berlin/DDR 1986, S.108f..

only in the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan. Namely the brutal Contra war against the Sandinista Nicaragua, the bloody counterinsurgency campaign against the leftist guerrilla in El Salvador, and the US support for the Islamist mujahideen in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion.

### Gladio and the Strategy of Tension

The Special warfare did not completely disappear from the scene in the second half of the 1970s. It had only shifted inward to the NATO-states themselves. Especially in Italy and Turkey a secret shadow army of NATO became active, which after its exposure became known under the name of its Italian offshoot, Gladio. In European NATO countries, including Turkey, as well as some neutral countries such as Sweden, Finland, Austria and Switzerland, secret armed forces have existed since the late 1940s as clandestine armed groups of a stay-behind network. Their "official" task was to take up resistance in case of a soviet invasion in the occupied countries. This force, whose administration was the Allied Clandestine Committee (ACC, also Allied Coordination Committee), as the NATO department for covert warfare and the Clandestine Planning Committee at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (Shape) in Brussels, was build up on secret agreements when joining NATO. The existence of Gladio, which was financed from the shadow budgets of the secret services, was concealed to the parliaments of the member states. These paramilitaries, which were trained by U.S. Special forces and British SAS units, were recruited from strictly anti-communist forces, including former 'Waffen SS' members in Germany and Mussolini fascists in Italy as well as the Grey Wolves in Turkey. NATO strategists were concerned about the strong communist and socialist parties in some European countries. In particular, in case of an electoral victory for the left in Italy, it was feared that NATO would be weakened from within. There, in the 1970s, Gladio switched to a "strategy of tension". Terrorist attacks were intended to discredit the left-wing parties and frighten the population, thus to strengthen the call for a strong state and to bring an authoritarian right-winged government to power. Gladio abducted, tortured and murdered people, manipulated media and disintegrated opposition groups. The bloodiest attack took place on August 2, 1980 on the Bologna train station, killing 84 people. "These massacres were organized or supported by people in institutions of the Italian state and men connected to the American intelligence," stated a Commission of Inquiry of the Senate in Rome in 2000.

The most lives were claimed by the strategy of tension in the second half of the 1970s in Turkey. The Gladio offshoot there had already been founded in 1953, a year after Turkey's NATO accession, as an "anti-terrorist organization" and was housed in the same building as the U.S. military mission. In 1964, this structure was directly incorporated under the new name "Office of Special Warfare" and put under the supervision of the General Staff. The operational units known as Counter-Guerrilla recruited largely from the ranks of the Grey Wolves, the paramilitary youth organization of the MHP. Their leader, ex-Colonel Alparslan Türkes, had himself completed a special warfare training in the USA in the 1950s. The basement for the activities of the Special Warfare Agency was an order copied verbatim from an US manual on unconventional warfare, which remarked the formation of secretly operating groups. Their tasks included assassinations, attacks, raids, torture, kidnappings, sabotage, and disinformation policy. From the mid-1970s until the coup on September 12, 1980, around 5,000 people died-most of them left-wing supporters, trade unionists, Alevis and Kurds- in civil war-like clashes. With assaults, the massacre in Taksim Square on May 1, 1977, the pogrom against Alevis in Maras in 1978, and the targeted murders of, among others, the socialist trade union leader Kemal Türkler, the counter-guerrilla prepared the mood for the September 12 coup among the insecure population. The leaders of this coup, which bloodily crushed the strong left- and workers movement and installed an authoritarian-neoliberal accumulation regime was the head of the Office of Special Warfare, General Evren, who later appointed himself head of state. While with the end of the Cold War the Gladio-units in the European countries were disbanded, although in most cases a public reappraisal was prevented, the counter-guerrilla remained active in

Turkey. The irregular forces now shifted their field of activity primarily to the Kurdish parts of the country and, in the light of the dirty war, increasingly merged with the mafia.

## NATO in Jihad

Among some liberal-minded commentators in Western media, the demonstrable cooperation of the Turkish NATO army with Islamists such as the al-Qaeda offshoot HTS and even the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq has caused irritation. After all, since the September 11, 2001, attacks in the U.S., NATO has been avowedly engaged in a global "war on terror." Yet Turkey is moving in its alliance policy with the jihadists in well-worn tracks. For the U.S. and NATO have repeatedly used Islamist forces as auxiliaries to achieve their geopolitical goals since the 1980s. In 1979, U.S. President Jimmy Carter ordered covert support for Islamist opponents of the left-wing secular government in Afghanistan. The goal was to provoke a Soviet invasion, so that "the Russians would fall into the Afghan trap" and "get their Vietnam War," Zbigniew Brzezinski, the U.S. president's adviser on national security issues, later freely admitted. Under Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan, the support for the mujahideen with weapons and money, negotiated by the Pakistani secret service, grew into the largest covert operation in CIA history. Between 1982 and 1992, around 35,000 jihadists from 40 countries were recruited for the "jihad" against the Soviet Union. In Wahabi madrasas/Islamic schools in Pakistan, which were financed with Saudi Arabian money, the ideological indoctrination of the volunteers took place first, followed by CIA-led guerilla warfare training in training camps run by the Pakistani intelligence. A successful recruiter for new holy warriors/jihadists was the wealthy Saudi entrepreneur's son Osama bin Laden. With the recruiting office for the mujahideen (MAK), the operational base had existed since the mid-1980s from which al-Qaeda, led by bin Laden, emerged in the early 1990s. "Al-Qaeda, literally 'the database', was originally a computer file containing the thousands of mujahideen who were recruited and trained with the help of the CIA to defeat the Russians", former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook revealed on July 7, 2005 in the Guardian. Brzezinski's plan worked. The ten-year war in the Hindu Kush contributed significantly to the collapse of Soviet rule.

From 1992 onward, Islamist fighters flocked from Afghanistan to Yugoslavia, where a bloody civil war raged. Once again, the tactical interests of NATO, which wanted to fight the remaining Yugoslavia under Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to its knees, coincided with those of al-Qaeda. With the approval of U.S. President Bill Clinton about 4,000 al-Qaeda fighters were armed and trained by the Bosnian Muslim army, while NATO fighter jets provided air support for the jihadist shock troops. Of course, al-Qaida never saw itself as a mercenary force of NATO. Rather, the U.S. was seen by the Islamists as the strategic enemy, which did not preclude tactical alliances such as those in Afghanistan and Bosnia. After the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 NATO troops invaded Afghanistan.

There, with the Taliban, the "disciples" from the Pakistani medreses created with Saudi and CIA support in the 1980s had in the meanwhile taken authority. While the Obama administration continued to escalate its drone war against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, once again the jihadists and the NATO stood shoulder-to-shoulder with each other in the Middle East and North Africa on a tactical level. For example, the Libyan al-Qaeda supporters formed the military experienced spearhead in the uprising against the Muammar al-Gaddafi's regime in 2011. The Islamist fighters received air support from NATO. Also, in Syria, the U.S. and its allies - especially Turkey and the Gulf states - did not hesitate to arm jihadist fighters for the intended overthrow of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. For example, in early 2012 the Pentagon intelligence (DIA) already described "the Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI (al-Qaeda in Iraq)" as the

"main drivers of the insurgency in Syria". The DIA assumed the "possibility of the creation of a constituent or unofficially declared Salafist caliphate in eastern Syria." That, it said, was "exactly what the opposition supporters want in order to isolate the Syrian regime and to contain Shiite expansion in Iraq by Iran", the DIA referred to the strategic outlook for the geopolitical goals of the West, the Gulf states, and Turkey. When the Islamic State (IS) emerged from a segment of al-Qaeda and proclaimed its cross-border caliphate and began threatening the security of the Western world with attacks in European countries as well, the U.S. spearheaded an international anti-IS coalition in 2014. For it was now a matter of jihadists who had become uncontrollable. The fight against IS sleeper cells is still being pursued by U.S. forces today after the crushing of IS's territorial rule as a justification for remaining in northern Syria.

### Dirty War in Kurdistan

Turkey proved to be a model student of the U.S. special war doctrine, drawing at the same time on its own experience going back to the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire. In the Kurdish parts of eastern Turkey, the army had already been conducting a special warfare since the beginning of the armed struggle by the guerillas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the mid-1980s. In the process, the army relied on systematic destruction of about 4,500 villages in order to isolate the guerrilla from the population. Taking advantage of feudal tribal structures, the state recruited and armed tens of thousands of so-called village guards, often build up with tribal warriors affiliated to clan chiefs who supported the ruling party against the PKK. Another element of the special war were killings by "unknown perpetrators," who subjected about 17,000 Kurdish civilians, including politicians from legal Kurdish parties such as HADEP and intellectuals such as the writer Musa Anter. The death squads of the Gendarmerie secret service Jitem, which is illegal even under Turkish law, were recruited from released criminals with ties to the Grey Wolves. In addition, there was the Kurdish-Sunni terrorist organization Hezbollah, which under the protection of the state murdered the supposedly infidel supporters of the liberation movement. As a special element of the special war, the irregular counter-guerrilla forces used systematic sexual violence against women.

The Turkish special war in Kurdistan has been and is being waged with the backing and coordination of NATO. Germany in particular not only supplies the weapons for this dirty war, but with the PKK ban it is also trying to cut off political and financial support for the liberation movement among the Kurdish diaspora. Today, Turkey, which occupies territories in northern Syria, is waging from there a textbook war of low intensity against the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria. Artillery shelling of villages, abductions of civilians, assassinations of tribal leaders with the aim of setting the region's various ethno-religious components against each other, the burning of crops, and the blocking of drinking water supply are all elements of this textbook special war. In this process, Turkey relies on a mercenary army of jihadists, including former IS members, under the command of the Turkish Intelligence Service. With the U.S. forming a tactical alliance in northern Syria with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) against the IS, tactical differences arise at most. For the NATO allies agree in the strategic objective of destroying the Kurdish liberation movement, as the engine of revolution in the Middle East. At the same time, it appears to be only a matter of time until the NATO uses the Turkish controlled ten-thousand-strong Islamist mercenary army, including numerous Uyghurs and Caucasians, for a new special war against China and Russia, as strategic adversaries of the West.