

AFGHANISTAN MASSACRE

One Rogue Soldier, Or Sign of the Times?

by Carl Osgood

March 24—While the military leadership of the United States is the leading voice of war avoidance with respect to Iran and Syria, the military establishment as a whole, particularly the U.S. Army, is in the process of disintegration. There is no evidence in the public record that this is the reason that top Army and other military leaders are warning about the consequences of yet another unnecessary war in the Muslim world, but they are certainly aware of the crisis within military ranks.

The March 11 Panjwai massacre in Afghanistan, allegedly by a single U.S. soldier, has put the spotlight on mental-health issues within the Army, and has further undermined the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in the country. Is SSgt. Robert Bales, the alleged Panjwai killer, a rogue soldier, or the product of a larger process that is taking down the entire U.S. military?

The American Army that George Washington was instrumental in giving birth to was born with a mission—not the mission that people think of today, but rather, the mission of building the new Republic that Washington had fought so hard to establish. That mission, as exemplified by the curriculum of the U.S. Military Academy in the decades after the War of 1812, was to be the most scientifically advanced engineering force in the world. West Point-trained engineers built America's first Trans-Continental Railroad, and helped build the Trans-Siberian Railroad, as part of economist Henry

Carey's strategy to outflank the British Empire by encircling the globe with steel rails. And when that force had to go to war, it seldom went to war without the full force of a mobilized nation behind it, with the strategy to bring that war to a decisive conclusion as rapidly as possible.

Despite some wrong-headed detours that occurred along the way, that engineering mission remained the focus of the U.S. military until the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1945. In the decades since, the U.S. military has lost its republican soul, that soul having been replaced by the dead soul of British Imperial geopolitics.

The Vietnam War, a war that the U.S. likely would have avoided had John F. Kennedy survived the assassins' bullets, played a key role in that degenerative process. It took away that sense of mission by, for the first time, plunging U.S. fighting forces into a war without end, in a country that was no threat to the U.S. The 1991 Iraq war, though short and seemingly decisive, completed the transformation of the U.S. military into an imperial force intended to enforce the global rule of the Anglo-American financier oligarchy. Although that transformation was resisted by President Bill Clinton, his two successors have embraced it with dangerous gusto. The 9/11 attacks were the trigger for the more than ten years of perpetual war since, with the Obama



DoD/Lance Cpl Phillip Elgie, USMC

The March 11 massacre of 16 Afghani civilians, allegedly by a rogue U.S. soldier, has put the spotlight on mental-health issues within the U.S. military, and further undermined the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in the country. Shown: U.S. Marines conduct counterinsurgency operations in southern Afghanistan, 2009.

Administration promising more, perhaps even the war that really will end all wars, by ending civilization itself.

Panjwai: No Aberration

When placed into this context of universal history, one can see that the Panjwai massacre in Afghanistan, allegedly perpetrated by a single U.S. soldier in the early morning hours of March 11, is no aberration, not the act of a “rogue soldier” who “snapped,” but rather, the lawful product of a process of degeneration of American society, and with it, the American military, that has been underway for decades. There is no longer the commitment to the future that once characterized most Americans.

That commitment was lost beginning with the Baby Boomer generation, which famously “tuned in, turned on, and dropped out.” Their children and grandchildren are even more degenerate, committed to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, and not much more. They have lost what makes them human through, among other things, their obsession with playing violent videogames that teach them how to kill more efficiently than the trained killers of previous generations. This is, as Lyndon LaRouche has characterized it, the “no future generation.”

Given this national environment, it should come as no surprise that the Army is rife with mental-health and disciplinary problems, problems that skyrocketed beginning with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The all-volunteer force has, in fact, been unable to meet the manpower demands of the wars, except by deploying people over and over again to the combat zones, a practice unheard of in prior wars.

According to the Army’s own 211-page report “Generating Health and Discipline in the Force,” released in January, the average infantryman serving in the Pacific during World War II saw about 40 days of combat in four years. Since the Iraq invasion, most soldiers have deployed at least once on a tour lasting 12 to 15 months. Many have deployed more than once, and most of those have had much less than the recommended 24 months “dwell time,” to rest, recuperate, and recover, before deploying again. Virginia-based military analyst Robert Maginnis, a retired Army officer, told the *Washington Times* on March 20, “I see these kids who have been in combat year after year after year. It is taking a real toll, not only medical, but being able to sort out their lives. What this kid [Bales] caved to I think could be an epidemic. It is really long term what we are doing to a generation of volunteers.”

In fact, according to Defense Department (DoD) figures, of the 1.35 million military personnel who have deployed to the war zones as of March 14, 2012, 632,592 deployed twice; 250,230 three times; 91,724, four times; 33,002, five times; and 36,254 more than five times.

Epidemic of Suicides

The same Army report states that there were 162 soldier suicides in 2011. In addition, 58 soldiers died while engaged in high-risk activities (riding a motorcycle down the highway at speeds over 100 miles per hour is a commonly cited example of high-risk behav-

ior); there were 56 murders committed by soldiers; 1,012 suicide attempts; 11,240 drug and alcohol offenders; and 42,698 criminal offenders. The numbers of soldiers who sought mental-health treatment are staggeringly high. A total of 280,403 sought out-patient care; 135,528 were prescribed drugs, including anti-anxiety medications; and 9,845 received in-patient care. That all adds up to a very large number of duty days lost to mental-health issues.

The Army has reacted to this situation by rapidly expanding its mental-health-care capacities, though there are still too few trained mental-health specialists to meet the demand. Soldiers are screened routinely now, before, during, and after deployments. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental-health specialists deploy to the war zones, and are available at every level of command, down to battalions.

The Defense Department has developed protocols for diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The DoD has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into research into understanding both the psychological injuries, and injuries to the brain. Yet, Army behavioral-health specialists briefing reporters at the Pentagon on March 23 could not answer the question, is there a link between PTSD/TBI and violent behavior? "There are no screening tools that can predict violent behavior," they said.

The consequences extend into the general population, as the Army moves to discharge soldiers who are no longer fit for duty, and otherwise reduces its ranks by nearly 80,000 soldiers over the next five years.

Spotlight on Lewis-McChord

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, outside Tacoma, Wash., home to some 34,000 soldiers, including Bales, has attracted a great deal of attention in recent months, because of the host of mental-health and disciplinary problems that have manifested themselves there. At least 12 soldiers assigned to the base committed suicide in 2011. Most recently, just before the Panjwai massacre, psychiatric officials at the Fort Lewis Madigan Army Medical Center were relieved of duty because of allegations that they had reversed as many as 285 PTSD diagnoses for the sole purpose of "saving money."

Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho has since given those 285 soldiers the chance to be re-evaluated. The suspect in the murder of a Mount Rainier Park Ranger, found dead on New Year's Day, was a Fort Lewis soldier whose own body was later found in

the park, and Fort Lewis was the home base of the infamous "kill team," a group of about half a dozen soldiers convicted last year of killing Afghan civilians for sport during their deployment there in 2010.

The problems at Lewis-McChord are not unique to it. Over the years of base closures and consolidations, the Army's combat force has been concentrated on fewer and fewer bases, as the number of soldiers grew from 480,000 to 570,000, making them potential petrie dishes for all kinds of mental-health problems, as the wars have taken their toll on the Army as a whole. A study by Army doctors, published last week in the British medical journal *Injury Prevention*, found that the suicide rate in the U.S. Army increased by 80% between 2003 and 2009, that is, during the period of the Iraq War and occupation. The more than 300 active-duty soldiers who committed suicide in 2010 and 2011, are an indication that nothing has improved since the period of the study. Between 1977 and 2003, the Army suicide rate was trending downwards, and was well below that of the civilian population. Now it's much higher.

Mental-health issues have impacted all Army bases, notably Fort Hood, Texas and Fort Carson, Colo. Fort Bragg, N.C., home of the XVIII Airborne Corps and the 82nd Airborne Division, saw 6 suicides and 25 domestic disputes in a five-week period in January and February, but it appears that Lewis-McChord is being hit harder than other bases, and nobody can explain why. One soldier based at Lewis-McChord told National Public Radio, on March 12, that the base's bad reputation is spreading throughout the Army. He reported that his father is an Army career counselor in Georgia, who sees reports from all of the different Army posts, "and he was asking why there's so much bad stuff going on on JBLM [Joint Base Lewis-McChord]."

There is no solution to the crisis within the Army, however. No matter how much, in terms of resources, the Army pours into trying to solve the problem, it will fail. There is no solution until President Obama is removed from office, a decisive break is made with the British-inspired perpetual war policy, and the country returns to economic policies that will give our young generation a future. Within that context, the Army can be returned to its roots, and, among other things, help to train the brigades of new engineers that will be required to build the great projects of the future.

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