

U.S. Joint Forces Command

Global Current Operations Media Summary

Operations Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom/Noble Eagle

Current as of March 10, 2010

➤ **New Developments**

- **Afghanistan War: Fight For Kandahar Won't Be Like Fight For Marjah.** The operation that American and coalition forces are planning for Kandahar in southern Afghanistan won't look like D-Day, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top commander there, said Tuesday. Fresh off a recent success, so far, in Helmand Province, American military planners are thinking ahead to the next phase of challenging the Taliban in southern Afghanistan: Kandahar. But the fight for Kandahar – described as the New York City of Afghanistan for its cultural, political, and economic significance – is expected to be more measured than the operation in Marjah in Helmand, which was a precision strike that began with the insertion of hundreds of U.S. marines by helicopter. “There won't be a D-Day that is climactic,” McChrystal told reporters in Kabul, during a trip in which he escorted Defense Secretary Robert Gates. ([Christian Science Monitor](#) – see attached)
- **U.S. Doubts Islamabad's Will To Pursue Militants.** When Pakistani officials announced last month they had detained the Afghan Taliban's second-in-command, their action raised a crucial question: is Islamabad now ready to take on the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as the U.S. has long demanded? Since that arrest of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who also served as the Taliban's military chief, Pakistani officials have reported the detention of four other named Taliban leaders and of a further four to five yet to be named. That follows a military offensive late last year in the Pakistani Taliban stronghold of South Waziristan. But although the Obama administration publicly praises Islamabad for increasing co-operation, doubts remain about the nature of the shift, as well as the motives for it. ([London Financial Times](#) – see attached)
- **Upset By U.S. Security, Pakistanis Return As Heroes.** A tour of the United States arranged by the State Department to improve ties to Pakistani legislators ended in a public relations fiasco when the members of the group refused to submit to extra airport screening in Washington, and they are now being hailed as heroes on their return home. Meetings with the Obama administration's top policy makers on Pakistan, including the president's special representative, Richard C. Holbrooke, and visits to the Pentagon and the National Security Council, did not allay the anger the politicians said they felt at being asked to submit to a secondary screening on Sunday before boarding a flight at Ronald Reagan National Airport to New Orleans. They declined to be screened and did not board the flight. ([New York Times](#) – see attached)
- **Taliban Claim Suicide Attack On NATO-Afghan Base.** The Taliban claimed responsibility Wednesday for a suicide bombing inside a U.S.-Afghan base in eastern Afghanistan that killed two NATO service members. A Taliban operative wearing an Afghan police uniform infiltrated the base Tuesday night and detonated his explosive vest next to a group of soldiers who were warming their hands beside a fire, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told The Associated Press by phone. U.S. troops command most of the eastern area bordering Pakistan, and local officials said they only knew of U.S. soldiers and Afghan border police on Chergotah base. A NATO statement on the attack confirmed that two of its service members died but did not give their nationalities. A number of others were wounded in the attack, the military alliance said. ([Charlotte Observer/AP](#))
- **UK's Miliband Urges Push For Afghan Peace Deal.** British Foreign Secretary David Miliband urged Afghans on Wednesday to push energetically for a peace settlement with Taliban insurgents and said Afghanistan's neighbors must support such an agreement. Miliband's conciliatory comments, in a speech to be given in the United States later on Wednesday, reflect growing acceptance in the West that Taliban fighters who break ties to al Qaeda have a role to play in the country's future. "Now is the time for the Afghans to pursue a political settlement with as much vigor and energy as we are pursuing the military and civilian effort," Miliband said in excerpts published in advance of a speech he is to give at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In a separate appearance in Boston on Tuesday night, Miliband said there was no longer a military solution for Afghanistan. ([Reuters](#))

- **5 Killed In Attack On World Vision In Pakistan.** Suspected militants armed with grenades attacked the offices of an international aid group in northwest Pakistan on Wednesday, killing five people working for the organization, police said. The attack targeted World Vision, a large Christian humanitarian group helping survivors of the 2005 Kashmir earthquake in Mansehra district. World Vision is headquartered in Federal Way, Wash. The dead were all Pakistanis and included two women, said police official Mohammad Sabir. Al Qaeda, the Taliban and allied groups are strong in northwestern Pakistan, but Mansehra lies outside the tribal belt next to Afghanistan where the militants have their main bases. Extremists have killed other people working for foreign aid groups in Pakistan and issued statements saying such organizations were working against Islam, greatly hampering efforts to raise living standards in the desperately poor region. ([FOX News/AP](#))

➤ **Military Coverage**

- **Unlawful Killing: Coroner Attacks Army Inadequacies Over Blast That Killed Four.** Special forces troops were sent to Afghanistan in unsuitable vehicles and without sufficient training and bomb-detecting kit, a coroner has found at the close of the inquest into the death of the only British female soldier killed in the country. In his narrative verdict into what he described as the unlawful killings of Corporal Sarah Bryant and three SAS reservists, David Masters highlighted widespread concern among soldiers about the limitations of Snatch Land Rovers. He also cited a shortage of more suitable off-road vehicles and the inadequate training for detecting improvised explosive devices, the biggest killer of troops in Afghanistan. ([Times of London](#) – see attached)
- **In This Afghanistan, Bombs Don't Kill.** It was a sunny California afternoon, and an Afghan war scene raged on the expansive grounds in San Diego of a little-known company called Strategic Operations Inc. A rocket-propelled grenade whistled out of a second-story window and smashed into the wall of an Afghan house, sending shrapnel flying. An Afghan police pickup truck exploded, kicking up a column of mottled smoke. Insurgents exchanged machine-gun fire with U.S. troops. The battle seemed dangerous, but that was just an illusion. The mayhem was all for show, part of Strategic Operations' elaborate use of Hollywood-style special effects to replicate the look and feel of the war in Afghanistan to help train U.S. forces preparing to deploy there. ([Wall Street Journal](#) – see attached)
- **More Military Trainers Needed In Afghanistan.** The U.S. Navy admiral who commands all NATO forces worldwide says he and the alliance secretary general are pressing each member to fulfill a specific part of the shortfall in military trainers in Afghanistan. The admiral spoke at a U.S. Senate hearing, where senior members from both parties criticized NATO allies for the shortage. Admiral James Stavridis gave the Senate Armed Services Committee specific numbers. He said the NATO-run command in Afghanistan needed 1,278 trainers for the growing Afghan Army and Police forces, but it has so far received only 541 - a shortfall of 737. The shortage of trainers comes at a time when Afghan Army recruiting is sharply up, due in part to a significant salary increase the Kabul government implemented late last year. ([Voice of America](#))
- **Ex-Spy Chief: U.S. Mised Allies Over Detainees.** United States intelligence agencies misled key allies, including Britain, about its mistreatment of suspected terrorists, the former head of the country's domestic spy agency, MI5, said Tuesday. Eliza Manningham-Buller, who retired in 2007 and is now a member of the House of Lords, said the U.S. deliberately suppressed details of its harsh handling of some detainees, including accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Britain's spy agencies have come under heavy criticism for their alleged collusion in the torture overseas of terrorist suspects, including detainees held in U.S. custody. ([MSNBC/AP](#))

➤ **Homeland Security**

- **JihadJane, An American Woman, Faces Terrorism Charges.** A petite, blond-haired, blue-eyed high school dropout who allegedly used the nickname JihadJane was identified Tuesday as an alleged terrorist intent on recruiting others to her cause, as federal prosecutors unsealed criminal charges that could send her to prison for life. Colleen Renee LaRose, 46, has been quietly held in U.S. custody since October on suspicions that she provided material support to terrorists and traveled to Sweden to launch an attack, according to federal officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity. LaRose, who lived in suburban Philadelphia, allegedly recruited men and women in the United States, Europe and South Asia to "wage violent jihad," according to an indictment issued in Pennsylvania. She fueled her interests on the Internet over the past few years and used Web sites such as YouTube to post increasingly agitated messages, the court papers said. ([Washington Post](#) – see attached)

- **Napolitano Says Suicide Plane Crash Wasn't Related To Domestic Terrorism.** A suicide plane crash that killed the pilot and an Internal Revenue Service worker at an office building in Austin on Feb. 18 was not a case of domestic terrorism, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said Tuesday in a radio interview. The pilot, A. Joseph Stack, 53, "had his own personal issues and personal motives" and was carrying out a personal agenda, said Napolitano, interviewed on WAMU-FM's "Diane Rehm Show." "To our belief, he was a lone wolf. He used a terrorist tactic, but an individual who uses a terrorist tactic doesn't necessarily mean they are part of an organized group attempting an attack on the United States," she said. ([Washington Post](#) – see attached)

➤ **World Developments**

- **U.S. Changing Focus Of Iran Policy.** After keeping a careful distance for the last year, the Obama administration has concluded that the Iranian opposition movement has staying power and has embraced it as a central element in the U.S.-led campaign to pressure the country's clerical government. Administration officials and some allied governments believe that a combination of domestic unrest and international sanctions targeting Iran's Revolutionary Guard offers the best hope for forcing Tehran to yield on its nuclear program, and could even lead to a change in the government. The administration has made the shift at a time when it is facing sharp domestic criticism over President Obama's failed initiative to launch negotiations with Iran and its perceived unwillingness to strongly back the opposition movement. ([Los Angeles Times](#) – see attached)
- **New Wrinkle In Joe Biden Agenda: 1,600 Units In Israeli Settlement.** As Vice President Joe Biden began four days of diplomatic meetings on Iran and the peace process, there was already a sign of uncertainty on the newly renewed Israeli-Palestinian talks. Two days after the U.S. brokered an agreement on the first negotiations between the sides in nearly a year, Israel's Interior Ministry Tuesday published plans to build a new neighborhood of 1,600 homes in east Jerusalem – following a separate announcement of 112 new units Monday. A Palestinian spokesman immediately denounced the move, and threatened to break off the talks before they even began. ([Christian Science Monitor](#) – see attached)
- **Intense Gunbattles Erupt In Mogadishu.** Heavy fighting broke out between Somali government forces and Islamist insurgents in Mogadishu early Wednesday, officials and witnesses said. The government side, which has been planning a large offensive against its foes, said the radical Shebab fighters attacked their position in the north of the capital at dawn, sparking the fierce gunbattles. No casualties were reported in the clashes, which witnesses reported involved the use of heavy machine-guns, anti-aircraft weapons and artillery fire. "The Shebab militants attacked our forces at the northern frontline of Abdulaziz this morning with heavy artillery and machine guns," Somali government security official Abdi Mohamed told AFP. ([Yahoo!/AFP](#))
- **UN Report: Much Of Somalia's Food Aid Diverted.** Much of the food aid intended for Somalia's poor is diverted to corrupt contractors, radical Islamist militants and local U.N. workers, according to a Security Council report. The findings, not yet made public, were first reported by *The New York Times* Tuesday. A UN diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed to AP that "a significant diversion" of food delivered by the UN food program is being diverted to cartels who were selling it illegally. The report blames the problem on improper food distribution, the diplomat said. *The Times* said the report recommends Secretary General Ban Ki-moon open an independent investigation into the World Food Program's Somalia operations. ([CBS News/AP](#))
- **Indonesia President Confirms Death Of Militant Dulmatin.** The Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has confirmed that the terror suspect Dulmatin was killed in a police raid in Jakarta. Indonesian security forces said they had killed three suspected militants in two raids on Tuesday. But they could not confirm that Dulmatin, alleged mastermind behind the 2002 Bali bombings, was among those killed. Mr. Yudhoyono is on a three-day trip to neighboring Australia. The raids were said to be linked to an ongoing operation against militants in Aceh province that has brought a number of arrests. The killing of Dulmatin will be greeted with particular enthusiasm in Australia - half of the 202 casualties in the Bali bombings were Australian. ([BBC](#))

* AP = Associated Press UPI = United Press International KR = Knight Ridder

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Afghanistan War: Fight For Kandahar Won't Be Like Fight For Marjah

Christian Science Monitor

March 09, 2010

The operation that American and coalition forces are planning for Kandahar in southern Afghanistan won't look like D-Day, the top commander there said Tuesday. Fresh off a recent success, so far, in Helmand Province, American military planners are thinking ahead to the next phase of challenging the Taliban in southern Afghanistan: Kandahar. But the fight for Kandahar – described as the New York City of Afghanistan for its cultural, political, and economic significance – is expected to be more measured than the operation in Marjah in Helmand, which was a precision strike that began with the insertion of hundreds of U.S. marines by helicopter.

“There won't be a D-Day that is climactic,” said Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top commander there told reporters in Kabul, during a trip in which he escorted Defense Secretary Robert Gates. “It will be a rising tide of security when it comes.” The operation in Marjah included about 2,500 marines and 1,500 Afghan soldiers – with as many as 10,000 troops in support. The top Marine commander in Marjah said last week the objective there was to come in “big, strong, and fast, [to] put the enemy on the horns of a dilemma.”

By contrast, the mission in Kandahar, expected to begin by summer, will be more gradual. Few details are clear, even in a counterinsurgency in which the NATO command has telegraphed its intentions before starting an operation, such as in Marjah last month. But military officials say Kandahar will require a more nuanced, measured approach in which forces will build up slowly, probably on the outskirts, before entering the city itself perhaps months later.

Kandahar is a much larger city and province, and coalition forces will take their time to enter due to the area's more complex political and tribal nature. McChrystal has had his eye on Kandahar, which the Taliban took over years ago, for a long time. But when he took charge of the mission last year, many American forces were already amassed in Helmand to the west.

While Helmand was a Taliban stronghold and much of the poppy crop that provides financial support for the insurgency grows there, many experts say it is not a strategic prize. Nonetheless, McChrystal mounted his first operation there under the new U.S. strategy (and increased troop strength), as a demonstration of what could be done. Citing the clear-hold-build approach, military officials say that most combat operations are over in Marjah and that it is now in the “hold and build” phase.

That leaves room to begin planning for Kandahar and the districts that surround it, including Zhari, Panjawai, Khakrez, Arghandab, and Dand. Counterinsurgency experts say these outer areas hold the key to success for coalition forces entering Kandahar itself. While not referring to operations in Kandahar specifically, Secretary Gates sought to prepare the military and the American and international community for the likelihood that the next few months will be no cakewalk.

“There is still much fighting ahead, and there will assuredly be more dark days,” Gate said at a press conference Tuesday with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, in Kabul. But there is reason to be hopeful that Afghan and coalition forces can rout the hardest elements of the Taliban and establish security for the rest of the population, he said. “Looking forward,” Gates said, “there are grounds for optimism as our countries pursue what President Karzai has called an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned initiative to ensure peace and stability.”

U.S. Doubts Islamabad's Will To Pursue Militants

London Financial Times

March 10, 2010

When Pakistani officials announced last month they had detained the Afghan Taliban's second-in-command, their action raised a crucial question: is Islamabad now ready to take on the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as the U.S. has long demanded? Since that arrest of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who also served as the Taliban's military chief, Pakistani officials have reported the detention of four other named Taliban

leaders and of a further four to five yet to be named. That follows a military offensive late last year in the Pakistani Taliban stronghold of South Waziristan. But although the Obama administration publicly praises Islamabad for increasing co-operation, doubts remain about the nature of the shift, as well as the motives for it.

“They have for years worked with us against al-Qaeda and they clearly recognize the dangers they themselves face from organizations like the Pakistani Taliban,” says one U.S. official. “Now they’re doing more against the Afghan Taliban too, for very pragmatic reasons. At the same time, they haven’t cut every tie to every militant outfit in the region.” Observers think it too early to conclude Pakistan’s military has decided to abandon the Taliban – a group it all but formed in the 1990s. Amid questions about the circumstances of Mullah Baradar’s detention, Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, told the *Financial Times* last week he was “agnostic” as to whether there had really been a change in Pakistani policy.

Washington is used to fluctuating Pakistani co-operation in the fight against Islamist militants. Peaks such as the 2003 detention of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the self-styled architect of the September 11 attacks, alternate with long troughs in which U.S. officials implore Islamabad to step up the fight. Recent months have seen a series of visiting American dignitaries make such requests, including Hillary Clinton, U.S. secretary of state, and Robert Gates, defense secretary, against a backdrop of about \$2 billion a year in U.S. military assistance to Pakistan and \$1.5 billion in civilian aid annually.

“The Pakistanis are acting in line with their interests. They’ve seen the American commitment in Afghanistan rise [with President Barack Obama’s decision to send 30,000 more troops] and they understand that it’s less acceptable than ever to have the leadership of the Afghan Taliban running loose in their country,” says the U.S. official, who argues Pakistan’s actions also potentially increase its influence “when it comes to a settlement in Afghanistan”.

As Hamid Karzai, Afghan president, prepares to visit Pakistan, the endgame in Afghanistan is rising up the agenda. After record western troop casualties in the past year, the U.S. has signaled that a pacified Taliban could be a future mainstream political player in the country. Islamabad is maneuvering for influence in Afghanistan against its arch-rival India before a U.S. troop drawdown scheduled to begin in July 2011. Mr. Karzai is to visit Pakistan in the next few days to discuss closer co-operation.

“The recent arrests could be meant to demonstrate Pakistan’s ability to nab key Taliban leaders, hold them, and then bring this group to the negotiating table,” said a western diplomat in Islamabad. “Given Pakistan’s interests and history versus India, I simply can’t buy the view that Islamabad has finally turned against the Taliban and cut off all its ties”. Teresita Schaffer, head of the south Asia program at Washington’s Centre for Strategic and International Studies, emphasizes the enduring importance for Islamabad of ties to the militants. “For the Pakistan military the primary purpose is to keep Pakistan at the centre of any negotiations involving the Taliban,” she says. “Keeping the Taliban in the game is important for Pakistan.”

Upset By U.S. Security, Pakistanis Return As Heroes

New York Times

March 09, 2010

A tour of the United States arranged by the State Department to improve ties to Pakistani legislators ended in a public relations fiasco when the members of the group refused to submit to extra airport screening in Washington, and they are now being hailed as heroes on their return home. “People should be thankful, you made them so proud,” said Hamid Mir, the host of a popular national talk show, during an interview in his studio on Tuesday with four of the six politicians, who railed against the security precautions at Ronald Reagan National Airport. Meetings with the Obama administration’s top policy makers on Pakistan, including the president’s special representative, Richard C. Holbrooke, and visits to the Pentagon and the National Security Council, did not allay the anger the politicians said they felt at being asked to submit to a secondary screening on Sunday before boarding a flight to New Orleans. They declined to be screened and did not board the flight.

Pakistan is one of 14 mostly Muslim countries whose citizens must go through increased checks before they fly into the United States, a procedure mandated by the Obama administration in the wake of the failed attempt by a Nigerian man to blow up an airliner flying from the Netherlands to Detroit on Dec. 25. The inclusion of Pakistan on the list was broadly criticized as an insult to a country that the United States calls an ally. The leader of the parliamentary group, Senator Abbas Khan Afridi, said in an interview on Tuesday that before they were to board the flight for New Orleans, he and his colleagues were selected from a crowd of passengers at the airport and asked to stand aside. They were then asked to accept a full-body scan by a machine, he said. Such body-scanning units are in use at 19 airports across the United States, and more are being installed. One of Mr. Afridi's colleagues, Akhunzada Chitan, told Mr. Mir on his "Capital Talk" program, "Going through a body scan makes you naked, and in making you naked, they make the whole country naked."

The lawmakers were chosen to visit the United States by the Political Section of the American Embassy. American officials are eager to reach out to political figures from the underdeveloped and isolated tribal areas where the Pakistani Army is now fighting to reclaim territory from the Taliban. The United States Agency for International Development pledged two years ago to spend \$750 million on various projects in the tribal areas, but residents there complain that they see more of the Taliban than American assistance. In preparatory briefings for their trip, the politicians were advised that they might have to submit to extra body searches, just as randomly selected Americans must submit to secondary screening by the new machines, two officials from the American Embassy said.

The Pakistanis were specifically warned that the United States was not a "V.I.P. culture," unlike Pakistan, where politicians are often exempted from unpalatable procedures that other people have to tolerate, the American officials said. "We are disappointed that the group took offense at the security procedures thousands of Americans and visitors must endure at airports every day," said Larry Schwartz, the senior communications adviser at the American Embassy in Islamabad. "No offense was intended. Indeed, they were warmly welcomed at high levels in Washington." The American Embassy in Islamabad has been endowed with an extra \$37 million by Congress to spend on exchange programs intended to show skeptical Pakistanis that the United States is a real ally, a country that wants to help, not hinder, Pakistan.

The people-to-people exchanges between Pakistan and the United States, which include American lecturers and teachers of English coming to Pakistan, is now the most ambitious of such efforts run by the State Department around the globe, Mr. Schwartz said. About 2,000 Pakistanis are expected to participate in the strengthened educational and cultural programs this year, he said. Indeed, a prime motivation of the protest against the screening procedures by the tribal area politicians appeared to be an effort to appeal to their home constituencies, many of whom regard the United States as an enemy. "Our people were very disturbed we were going to America," Mr. Afridi said. "We were under threat for going to the United States. We took the risk to see if America was interested in solving the problems."

The State Department paid each of the participants \$200 a day for accommodations and food during their stay in the United States. If the American taxpayers wanted the money for the expenses refunded, he would be happy to do so, said Mr. Afridi, 40, who described himself as a major trader in cement, with businesses across Pakistan and in Afghanistan. "We can pay back the \$200 a day, no problem," he said. Then, he drove off in his brand-new Hummer – an example of his affection for American autos, he said – to appear on another television program to tell his story of standing up to the American authorities.

Unlawful Killing: Coroner Attacks Army Inadequacies Over Blast That Killed Four

Times of London

March 10, 2010

Special forces troops were sent to Afghanistan in unsuitable vehicles and without sufficient training and bomb-detecting kit, a coroner has found at the close of the inquest into the death of the only British female soldier killed in the country. In his narrative verdict into what he described as the unlawful killings of Corporal Sarah Bryant and three SAS reservists, David Masters highlighted widespread concern among soldiers about the limitations of Snatch Land Rovers. He also cited a shortage of more suitable off-road vehicles and the inadequate training for detecting improvised explosive devices, the biggest killer of troops in Afghanistan.

The coroner said that he would relay his findings to the Ministry of Defence to help to prevent future loss of life. His verdict is an embarrassing public criticism of the military's shortfalls just days after the Prime Minister insisted he had met all requests for equipment in Iraq, Britain's other major defence commitment this century. Families of the dead soldiers urged the Government to listen to the coroner's comments regarding the use of lightly-armored Snatch Land Rovers on the frontline as well as the poor supply of EBEX mine detectors for training and use on the ground.

"We hope the lack of resources and shortcomings in training and planning, which have been exposed in the evidence we have heard, will not be repeated," said the relatives of two of the special forces soldiers from the 23rd Special Air Service Regiment, a Territorial Army unit. "We hope that the MoD will heed the recommendations of the coroner and that, by reason of the changes they make, no other families will have to stand in the position in which we stand today," they said, speaking through their lawyer, Adam Wilson.

Corporal Sarah Bryant, of the Intelligence Corps, and Corporal Sean Reeve, Lance-Corporal Richard Larkin and Trooper Paul Stout, of the 23rd SAS Regiment, were the last troops to die in the fortified Land Rover when it hit an improvised explosive device on June 17, 2008. A fifth soldier survived the explosion, which was triggered when one of the vehicle's back wheels struck the pressure-plate bomb, weighing more than 50kg, while trying to navigate a shallow ditch in rural terrain to the east of Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital of Helmand.

Delivering his verdict Mr. Masters, the assistant deputy coroner for Wiltshire and Swindon, highlighted widespread concern among soldiers about using Snatch Land Rovers because they were difficult to drive off-road, limiting mobility, and lacked a mounted machine gun. "The evidence has clearly shown the Snatch Land Rover was not the preferred vehicle of choice for the evolving task upon which the police mentoring team was engaged," he said, referring to the troops who were deployed alongside Afghan police in Helmand province. "There was significant disquiet about those vehicles being the only resource available to this unit."

Mr. Masters said that the commanding officer had requested an alternative version of Land Rover, known as a WMIK, which is more suited to rural terrain, but to no avail. "There was only a finite supply of vehicles to be allocated across the whole brigade," he told the inquest, attended by family members of the four soldiers, at Trowbridge Town Hall. Mr. Masters also criticized the "inadequate" training on detecting improvised explosive devices given to the SAS reservists before they deployed to Afghanistan in December 2007 and while they were on the ground.

In addition, he cited a "theatre-wide shortage" of EBEX mine detectors, a military form of metal detector. "Not only was there a shortage of that equipment for training but also for use in earnest in the field," the coroner said, in a summing up of evidence heard over the past week from witnesses including several other SAS reservists. Bill Rammell, the Armed Forces Minister, pledged to respond as quickly as possible to the "serious questions" raised in the coroner's verdict.

He admitted that training in countering improvised explosive devices at the time "could have been better", but emphasized the improvements that have been made over the past few years. "Since 2006 we have spent £1.7 billion on 1,800 new and better equipped vehicles, and our efforts to counter IEDs have been transformed," he said. Liam Fox, the Shadow Defence Secretary, said that the shortfalls in equipment and training exposed by the inquest contrasted with the testimony by the Prime Minister at the Iraq inquiry last week. This is why "he needs to be recalled to clarify his evidence", he added.

The inquest found that Corporal Bryant, 26, Corporal Reeve, 28, and Trooper Stout, 31, died "virtually instantly" from blast wounds. Lance-Corporal Larkin, 39, who was driving, died from injuries to the chest and abdomen after being trapped behind the steering wheel of the Snatch Land Rover. Mr. Brown revealed on a trip to Afghanistan at the weekend that 200 new patrol vehicles would replace the Snatch Land Rover, which has been criticized for several years for offering inadequate protection against roadside bombs. The families of four other soldiers killed in the vehicle are suing the MoD, arguing that they should not have been used on the frontline.

In This Afghanistan, Bombs Don't Kill

Wall Street Journal

March 10, 2010

It was a sunny California afternoon, and an Afghan war scene raged on the expansive grounds in San Diego of a little-known company called Strategic Operations Inc. A rocket-propelled grenade whistled out of a second-story window and smashed into the wall of an Afghan house, sending shrapnel flying. An Afghan police pickup truck exploded, kicking up a column of mottled smoke. Insurgents exchanged machine-gun fire with U.S. troops. The battle seemed dangerous, but that was just an illusion. The mayhem was all for show, part of Strategic Operations' elaborate use of Hollywood-style special effects to replicate the look and feel of the war in Afghanistan to help train U.S. forces preparing to deploy there.

Business is booming for Strategic Operations, which has found an unusual way of profiting from the U.S. escalation of the Afghan war. Many of the reinforcements President Barack Obama is dispatching to Afghanistan are likely to spend time on a Strategic Operations set. The Army and Marine Corps pay Strategic Operations to build and maintain mock Afghan cities – complete with mosques, restaurants and houses – at large military training facilities. The fake villages are then populated with real Afghans, who play the parts of insurgents, tribal leaders and Afghan soldiers. Real amputees play injured U.S. soldiers.

"If you want to play cowboys and Indians, you hire an Indian to play an Indian," says Marine Staff Sgt. Chad Marquette, who works with Strategic Operations on Afghan-themed training exercises at a Marine base in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. The company goes to great lengths to make their fake battles feel authentic. A military contact recently emailed photos of the dead animals that litter the scenes of roadside bombings in Afghanistan. Strategic Operations' prop makers – who got their start working in TV and movie production – immediately began fashioning fake dog and donkey corpses. Strategic Operations is based in a nondescript industrial park on the northern fringes of San Diego.

The tan-colored mosques and houses in the mock Afghan village there look out over nearby office buildings belonging to large government contractors like Raytheon and General Dynamics. During a recent visit, Stu Segall, the company's owner, walked into a cavernous storage room filled with foam kebabs, loaves of bread and other props that will be used in the mock Afghan villages. In the distance, a prop master sprayed red and white paint on a row of fake lamb carcasses. "We had to use an actual goat head to get this right," Mr. Segall says, picking up the mold of a very real-looking animal head. "It smelled something awful."

Strategic Operations was the brainchild of Mr. Segall, a former movie and TV producer, and Kit Lavell, a decorated Navy pilot who once flew combat missions over Vietnam. Some low-budget television series are still filmed in Mr. Segall's San Diego studio complex, but he and Mr. Lavell devote almost all their time to Strategic Operations. They make for an odd couple. Mr. Segall worked on adult films in California's San Fernando Valley in the 1970s, rarely uses a computer, and curses regularly. Mr. Lavell is a soft-spoken man whose office is dotted with pictures of his children and grandchildren.

Mr. Lavell estimates that Strategic Operations has trained more than 250,000 soldiers and Marines in the past five years, and expects that number to increase sharply in 2010. The six-year-old company, which has 80 full-time employees, has been profitable for years, and Mr. Lavell says its revenues doubled in 2009 because of increased military demand for its services. During a recent Army training exercise, amputee actor Heather Lewis was sitting in the back of a Humvee dressed as a female soldier when the vehicle went over a simulated car bomb. When a real soldier from the unit reached into the smoke-filled truck to pull her to safety, Ms. Lewis's prosthetic leg came off, sending fake blood spurting into the air. "He just went 'uhh!' and dropped me," says Ms. Lewis, a Strategic Operations employee who lost her leg to cancer as a child.

The company operates like a movie production. It employs a core group of 80 full-time employees, as well as roughly 216 part-time ones. Depending on the project, it can quickly hire hundreds of other actors, prop makers and explosive technicians on a contract basis. In August 2007, for instance, it sent 650 part-time workers – including 400 actors – to an Iraq-themed training exercise at a nearby military airfield. When

they aren't pretending to be at war, many of the company's actors drive taxi cabs and work at restaurants. Iraq-born Imad al-Jabi wore a white dishdasha and played the role of an insurgent during a recent Iraq simulation at Strategic Operations' San Diego headquarters. "The rest of the time I work in a pizza shop," he says with a shrug.

After more than five years of fake war, the company's Hollywood-trained make-up artists are capable of recreating a staggering number of grisly battlefield wounds, from burns to pieces of shrapnel that appear to jut out from actors' eyeballs. "After a while, you start to feel like you've been through medical school," says Carol Helm, who runs Strategic Operations' eight-person make-up department. The company devotes just as much time to its fake weapons, like the rocket-propelled grenades that appear to fly right at their targets.

In reality, the grenades are souped-up fireworks that travel safely along invisible wires. The "shrapnel" that flies through the air after one of the grenades detonates is Peruvian cork, which disintegrates on contact with human flesh or a hard surface. When the simulations go off as planned, soldiers and Marines get to experience realistic re-creations of life in the war zones. During a "Mountain Warrior" training exercise last fall at the Marines Mountain Warfare Training Center near Lake Tahoe, Afghan immigrant actor Kajalilullah Gul played a village elder while his colleague Zabiullah Zaheer played the mullah of a friendly village.

Mr. Gul, a former translator for the U.S. army in Afghanistan, moved to California in 2008 and has worked as a role-player ever since for a Strategic subcontractor, Tatitlek Support Services Inc. He gets paid roughly \$17 an hour, plus benefits. Mr. Zaheer's script said to remain friendly unless the Marines did something culturally insensitive, like questioning one of the female Afghans without the permission of their fake husbands or fathers.

Mr. Lavell, the former Navy pilot, says he is never bothered when Marines or soldiers mess up during one of the company's war simulations. "Its better that they make the mistakes with us before they go off into the real world," he says. "The whole point is to learn, and that's better done here than there."

JihadJane, An American Woman, Faces Terrorism Charges

Washington Post

March 10, 2010

A petite, blond-haired, blue-eyed high school dropout who allegedly used the nickname JihadJane was identified Tuesday as an alleged terrorist intent on recruiting others to her cause, as federal prosecutors unsealed criminal charges that could send her to prison for life. Colleen Renee LaRose, 46, has been quietly held in U.S. custody since October on suspicions that she provided material support to terrorists and traveled to Sweden to launch an attack, according to federal officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the case is continuing to unfold.

LaRose, who lived in suburban Philadelphia, allegedly recruited men and women in the United States, Europe and South Asia to "wage violent jihad," according to an indictment issued in Pennsylvania. She fueled her interests on the Internet over the past few years and used Web sites such as YouTube to post increasingly agitated messages, the court papers said. As an American citizen whose appearance and passport allowed her to blend into Western society, LaRose represents one of the worst fears of intelligence and FBI analysts focused on identifying terrorist threats. She is one of only a handful of women to be charged with terrorism offenses in the United States, national security experts said.

Across the ocean Tuesday, Irish police conducted morning raids in Cork and Waterford, arresting four men and three women who had been under electronic surveillance by U.S. and Swedish authorities. The seven were suspected of plotting with LaRose to attack a Swedish artist, Lars Vilks, whose 2007 drawing of the prophet Muhammad with the body of a dog enraged Muslims, according to Irish news accounts. Justice Department officials declined to comment on the arrests in Ireland or on whether Vilks was a target of LaRose's.

David Kris, assistant attorney general for the national security division, said the prospect that a suburban American woman had conspired to support terrorists and traveled overseas to advance a plot "underscores the evolving nature of the threat we face." Mark Wilson, a lawyer for LaRose at the Federal Community Defender Office in Philadelphia, declined to comment. LaRose has not yet been scheduled for an arraignment on the charges, according to a spokeswoman for U.S. Attorney Michael L. Levy.

The path that LaRose, who is 4 feet 11 inches tall and weighs barely more than 100 pounds, may have taken to jihad remains murky. She has been married at least twice and, over several years since the mid-1980s, had been arrested in South Texas for writing bad checks and driving while intoxicated, according to court records obtained by *The Washington Post*. Investigators suggest that she turned to the Internet a few years ago, using the names JihadJane and Fatima LaRose. In a December 2007 Internet posting located by *The Post*, "Fatima LaRose," who said she lived in Pennsylvania, asked for advice about how to bring an Egyptian boyfriend with whom she had been corresponding for more than a year to the United States for Christmas.

Months later, the indictment said, "JihadJane" described herself in a June 2008 YouTube posting as "desperate to do something somehow to help" suffering Muslims. LaRose allegedly went on to recruit others, asking whether the prospects were European citizens who could travel freely. She looked for recruits whose physical appearance would "blend in with many people" and go undetected in Europe and the United States. She allegedly agreed to marry one co-conspirator in an effort to ease his path to Europe, according to e-mails cited in the indictment. By March 2009, LaRose had reached out to the Swedish Embassy for information about how to acquire permanent residency in Sweden. The man identified as her potential fiancé sent her instructions to "go to sweden . . . find location of" the target and "kill him . . . this is what i say to u." LaRose allegedly responded, "i agree that it is good i blend in."

FBI agents interviewed LaRose in July 2009 in Pennsylvania, where she told them that she had not solicited money for terrorism or posted on a terrorist Web site, according to the indictment, nor used the handle "JihadJane." In August, LaRose removed and hid the hard drive from her home computer, authorities said. The same day, she traveled to Sweden "with the intent to live and train with jihadists, and to find and kill" her target, the indictment said. LaRose took with her the U.S. passport of a man identified only as "K.G.," with whom she lived, to give it to "the brothers," the indictment said.

In September, she performed online searches to find her target, joined an electronic community that he hosted and journeyed to his artists' enclave in Sweden, the indictment said. By Sept. 30, LaRose e-mailed the man identified as her fiancé, saying it would be "an honour & great pleasure to die or kill for" him and asserting that "only death will stop me here that i am so close to the target!" LaRose ultimately returned to the United States, where she was charged in October in a criminal complaint with helping transfer a U.S. passport belonging to K.G. She appeared in court in Pennsylvania on Oct. 16, where she was appointed a public defender, according to a spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney and a representative in the public defender's office.

Authorities declined to address Tuesday why the grand jury indictment of LaRose remained under seal for so long and whether she may have helped law enforcement during her months-long incarceration. But the Justice Department has used such a strategy in several cases to glean more intelligence information on suspects and plots before making their investigations public, veterans of the department said. Spokesman Dean Boyd said "there were investigative activities we had to protect, and had the case been made public . . . those activities could have been jeopardized." J. Patrick Rowan, former chief of the Justice Department's national security division, said the LaRose indictment is "another indication of how the threats come from all directions." "If nothing else, it's another reminder to the FBI of the obligation to run down every lead and every threat, because they can't be too far-fetched," Rowan said.

Napolitano Says Suicide Plane Crash Wasn't Related To Domestic Terrorism

Washington Post

March 10, 2010

A suicide plane crash that killed the pilot and an Internal Revenue Service worker at an office building in Austin on Feb. 18 was not a case of domestic terrorism, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said Tuesday in a radio interview. The pilot, A. Joseph Stack, 53, "had his own personal issues and personal motives" and was carrying out a personal agenda, said Napolitano, interviewed on WAMU-FM's "Diane Rehm Show." "To our belief, he was a lone wolf. He used a terrorist tactic, but an individual who uses a terrorist tactic doesn't necessarily mean they are part of an organized group attempting an attack on the United States," she said.

Federal authorities ordinarily let the FBI and prosecutors decide whether to charge a domestic suspect with terrorism-related crimes, but because Stack died at the scene, the characterization of the incident is still open to debate. On the day of the crash, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs initially said the incident did not appear to be related to terrorism, but he later said he meant that it didn't appear to be tied to a foreign-based plot by a group such as al-Qaeda. He declined to rule out domestic terrorism.

In Austin, Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Tex.), a member of the House Homeland Security Committee who represents the Austin area, told Fox News, "I think when you fly an airplane into a federal building to kill people . . . it sounds like [terror] to me." In a suicide note posted on his Web site, Stack referred to a "storm raging in my head" and detailed grievances with government, "Mr. Big Brother IRS man," large corporations and others.

Napolitano distinguished Stack from Timothy J. McVeigh -- who was convicted and executed for carrying out the 1995 attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people -- citing McVeigh's "tactics, organization, motivation and the like." "When you get to a lone wolf, which is what really the Austin issue was, it's very debatable whether you would put them in the same bucket," Napolitano said.

U.S. Changing Focus Of Iran Policy

Los Angeles Times

March 10, 2010

After keeping a careful distance for the last year, the Obama administration has concluded that the Iranian opposition movement has staying power and has embraced it as a central element in the U.S.-led campaign to pressure the country's clerical government. Administration officials and some allied governments believe that a combination of domestic unrest and international sanctions targeting Iran's Revolutionary Guard offers the best hope for forcing Tehran to yield on its nuclear program, and could even lead to a change in the government.

The administration has made the shift at a time when it is facing sharp domestic criticism over President Obama's failed initiative to launch negotiations with Iran and its perceived unwillingness to strongly back the opposition movement. Meanwhile, the protests sparked by June's disputed presidential election in Iran grew despite a tough crackdown.

This new approach is not a sure thing: It is far from clear that squeezing the Revolutionary Guard, a sprawling military organization that has vast business interests and is close to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, would seriously damage it or strengthen the opposition, as the administration hopes. And despite high-profile encouragement by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and other U.S. officials, many opposition activists fear that Washington's embrace will bring more harm than good. "Just leave us alone, please," one activist in Tehran pleaded.

Still, U.S. officials and some European allies believe that there is less downside to openly supporting the opposition now because Iran has grown more politically polarized and the opposition is under direct assault. Clinton, visiting the Persian Gulf region last month, warned repeatedly that Iran was becoming a "military dictatorship" and tried to draw a distinction between the power structure and the protest movement, which she said cared more about the lives of average Iranians. "They don't want to see sanctions," she said of the Iranian opposition. "They don't want to see the end to their democracy. They don't want to see the rise of an unelected body or a non-clerical body, namely the Revolutionary Guard, assuming all of this power."

The administration's support for the opposition has been an issue since the June 12 presidential election. The perception of widespread electoral fraud sparked huge demonstrations against Ahmadinejad that have continued sporadically despite a violent crackdown and the imprisonment of protesters. But the relatively poor turnout at protests on the Feb. 11 anniversary of the Islamic Revolution has raised questions about the movement's momentum.

Whereas Clinton previously talked about "crippling" sanctions aimed broadly at the Iranian public, the administration is now pressing the U.N. Security Council for international sanctions targeting the Revolutionary Guard. The administration and its European allies appear to be gaining Russian support, but serious questions remain about China.

Separately, the Treasury Department in February slapped U.S. sanctions on some organizations and individuals tied to the Revolutionary Guard. "Sanctions are increasingly being looked at by the administration in the context of how these measures could be potentially helpful to the cause of political reform in Iran," said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Depriving the Revolutionary Guard of the ability to sign billion-dollar contracts and turning them into an international pariah would be welcomed by many democratic activists in Iran."

Though U.S. officials have emphasized that they are not trying to overthrow the Iranian government, Vice President Joe Biden and national security advisor James L. Jones have cheered those pressing for a tougher approach by speaking publicly about the prospects for political change. The new approach does not include formal ties to Iranian dissidents; however, there have been intermittent contacts with some Iranians connected to the opposition. Administration officials have urged private telecommunications firms to do what they can to enable opposition access to the Internet and other forms of communication.

Late last year, the administration spurred a change in U.S. sanctions to improve Iranians' access to software needed for certain communication processes. "We're focusing now on how pressures from the outside, combined with pressure from the inside, could turn this around," said a U.S. official who is regularly briefed on the administration's approach.

Some reformers in Iran are fearful that the U.S. approach will bring problems. "It puts reformist and civic activists in danger," said Yousef Mollai, a professor of law at Tehran University and a reformist. "The Islamic Republic is waiting for any document showing covert or overt help of the U.S. to the Iranian opposition to claim, 'Hey, look, the reformists are the paid lackeys of the U.S. administration.' And then there will be more pretexts for arrests."

Morad Saghafi, a social scientist and magazine editor who supports opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi, said there are "no common values shared between the Iranian opposition and the U.S. administration. Their foreign policy in the U.S. is prioritized according to their own set of values, which are not shared here." A European official acknowledged that the strategy may be dangerous because of risks to the opposition. The official, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue, said that it might take years for the opposition effort to yield results, while international concerns about the Iranian nuclear program are immediate.

U.S. officials and their allies believe that Iran is trying to develop expertise to build nuclear weapons, an allegation Tehran denies. A U.N. report last month said its nuclear investigators had found indications of "past or current undisclosed activities" aimed at building weapons. As Iran has continued its enrichment efforts, there have been increased calls in Washington, including from some congressional Democrats, for the administration to step up support for political change in Iran.

Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations think tank, recently wrote that he no longer supported efforts to engage Iran in talks and wanted Western governments to focus on nonviolent means of promoting political change in Iran. "The nuclear talks are going nowhere," he wrote in Newsweek. "Instead we should be focusing on another fact: Iran may be closer to profound political change than at any time since the revolution that ousted the shah 30 years ago."

New Wrinkle In Joe Biden Agenda: 1,600 Units In Israeli Settlement

Christian Science Monitor

March 09, 2010

As Vice President Joe Biden began four days of diplomatic meetings on Iran and the peace process, there was already a sign of uncertainty on the newly renewed Israeli-Palestinian talks. Two days after the U.S. brokered an agreement on the first negotiations between the sides in nearly a year, Israel's Interior Ministry Tuesday published plans to build a new neighborhood of 1,600 homes in east Jerusalem – following a separate announcement of 112 new units Monday. A Palestinian spokesman immediately denounced the move, and threatened to break off the talks before they even began.

"With such an announcement, how can you build trust? This is destroying our efforts to work with Mr. Mitchell," said Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator. "It's a really disastrous situation. I hope that this will be an eye-opener for all in the international community about the need to have the Israeli government stop such futile exercises." The incident highlights the tentative nature of negotiations that are already fraught with mistrust. Upset about Israeli building on lands they claim for a future state, Palestinians relented Sunday on a boycott of negotiations only after prodding by U.S. and Arab allies and on condition they be indirect.

A statement from the Israeli Interior Ministry, which is run by Eli Yishai of the religious nationalist Shas party, described the move as a "procedural" decision on a plan that's been awaiting action for three years. The timing for the approval for the project is coincidental, the statement said. "The prime minister's office only found out about this today," said an Israeli official who requested to remain anonymous. "It's a preliminary stage of a building process. Israeli development in Jerusalem has been a particularly sore issue recently with the Palestinians. Just last week Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat spoke of a plan to turn a dilapidated Palestinian neighborhood into a tourist park and commercial center, while relocating residents to new housing with special financing.

Earlier in the day another potential disagreement in talks cropped up during remarks before Biden's meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres. Responding to Palestinian demands that the indirect negotiations focus first on borders, Mr. Peres sought to lower expectations. He warned that tackling that topic first could upend talks because some infuse borders with a holy significance. Though Peres' role is only ceremonial, he could have been floating a trial balloon for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. While the Palestinians are eager for new Israeli land concessions, for the Israeli prime minister border talks could mean potentially recognizing the 1967 Green Line as the basis for negotiations.

The gap highlights the question of whether Israelis and Palestinians will pick up the talks where they were left off under the previous more dovish administration, or whether they will start anew. The announcement of the 1,600 new housing units could knock Biden's trip off kilter. One of the vice president's missions has been to shore up the U.S.-Israeli diplomatic ties after the two allies sparred publicly last year over building in Jerusalem and the West Bank. He is also trying to soothe Israeli worries about facing a nuclear Iran. "There is absolutely no space between the U.S. and Israel in terms of Israel's security," Biden said before a morning meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres.