



## Pseudo-Operations to Neutralize Extremist Networks, Insurgents, and Terrorists

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Terrorism is a threat to the stability and national security of many countries, and has undermined countless governments. However, technological improvements within the last century have allowed greater, more spectacular attacks and broadened the means by which terrorists may broadcast their message. Although previous terrorist attacks against United States citizens have drawn a measure of global attention, the world became acutely aware of the effects of terrorism on 11 September 2001 during the World Trade Center attack orchestrated by Osama Bin Laden and his terror group al Qaeda. The psychological impact of such a devastating attack—conducted so efficiently at such little cost to the attacker—jumpstarted a global level of effort to defeat terrorism and extremism. Indeed, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates identified terrorism as a Global National Defense priority in his 2008 National Defense Strategy, and discussed terrorism on 15 occasions throughout his 23-page report.<sup>1</sup> Degrading terrorism requires full-spectrum deterrence and counter strategies: the incorporation of effective foreign policy measures against state-sponsors of terrorism; international security forces assistance programs to ensure competent counter-terror skill-sets within our allies' ranks; military or police action to kinetically defeat armed resistance or restore sovereignty; and other internal defense and development programs to deny terrorists sanctuary or resources and political advantage.

That stated, terrorists' geographic or political sanctuaries that the United States cannot directly or indirectly influence through foreign policy initiatives will remain in certain pockets of the world, such as the remaining insurgent-terror organization FARC<sup>2</sup> controlled areas of Colombia or Somalia. Assuming that some terrorists will remain irreconcilable for a variety of reasons not discussed here, and that comprehensive deterrence strategies or counter-terror efforts may prove ineffective, then how does the United States influence or neutralize irreconcilable terrorists protected by a foreign population? What tools can be implemented to eradicate, deflect, isolate, or neutralize typically suicidal extremists employing terror as a weapon? One consideration is pseudo-operations. Penetration of terrorist and insurgent groups by foreign services is inherently difficult, due to the existing mistrust within the organization and extensive vetting required for membership. Pseudo-operations may overcome these challenges and create conditions congruent with the interests of the United States, as several case studies will demonstrate in a later section. However, an overview of what pseudo-operations are and what they can do is first necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, National Defense Strategy, 2008, Washington D.C.

<sup>2</sup> FARC is an acronym in Spanish for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

Douglas C. Lovelace, Director of the Strategic Studies Institute, described Pseudo-operations as, “. . . operations . . . in which government forces disguised as guerrillas [terrorists / insurgents], normally along with guerrilla [terrorist / insurgent] defectors, operate as teams to infiltrate insurgent areas.”<sup>3</sup> Pseudo-operations create a number of operational conditions and effects unique to their modus operandi: pseudo-operations allow terrorist sympathizers to seek out the more effective and well-resourced State-sponsored pseudo-organization for assistance; all vetting of individual members can be conducted through careful staging of operations, planned meetings, and detailed information operations; penetration of terrorist groups is both passive (attraction) *and* active (targeting), which greatly enhances the probability of successful operations. Information exchange and operational collaboration between the pseudo-organization and terrorists would yield the information necessary for the government to choose the method and time / place of the offensive mission. The information advantage also allows flexibility for neutralizing pending terrorist operations, disinformation among the terrorist organizations, and the generation of mistrust between terrorist leaders. Moreover, critical terrorist resources, infrastructure, and sanctuaries can be hijacked by the pseudo-organization in accordance with United States interests. These supplemental effects can be combined with other comprehensive deterrence and counter-terror operations, likely leading to higher success rates in defeating terrorist organizations and preventing catastrophic attacks. Other governments have historically achieved better effects and demonstrated the benefits just described, as the following case studies include such aspects of pseudo-operations.

Various governments have successfully conducted domestic pseudo-operations with police and military forces, solving internal insurgency problems where the insurgents employed terrorism or organized resistance against the government. While police organizations may conduct pseudo-operations and sound conceptually like “sting” operations, pseudo-operations employ larger groups with a greater variety of capabilities and tasks. Although they employed barbarism to achieve success, Lenin’s Bolshevik State Security Service, or *Cheka*, developed an organization in 1922 called *The Trust*. Former United States Deputy Director of Counter-Intelligence Raymond Rocca describes how Cheka Head Felix Dzerzhinsky established *The Trust*<sup>4</sup> as a well organized and resourced front organization whose advertised goal was the overthrow of the Lenin Government. *The Trust* assimilated key members (under foreign sanctuary) of the competing insurgencies to legitimize their effort, killed or captured the core of the insurgent leadership, and isolated / neutralized the remaining members. In addition to effectively neutralizing all capable opposition to Lenin’s Government, *The Trust* also effectively passed disinformation to a number of foreign intelligence services intent on identifying Lenin’s Government weaknesses. Understandably, most countries do not share the Lenin Government system of values; however, the ways and means of pseudo-operations do not require barbarism for effectiveness. Other governments have conducted similar operations without the extensive barbarism of the Cheka.

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas C. Lovelace, as quoted in the Foreword, Lawrence E. Cline, 2005. “Pseudo operations and counterinsurgency lessons from other countries.” Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS61435> (accessed March 2, 2010), iii.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond G. Rocca, 1990. “The Trust.” Center for Intelligence Studies. [http://www.centerforintelligencestudies.com/historic\\_documents.html](http://www.centerforintelligencestudies.com/historic_documents.html) (accessed August 29, 2008).

The Rhodesian Government conducted successful pseudo-operations against two insurgent organizations in the early 1970s until their ultimate political defeat in 1979. Lawrence E. Cline, a counter-terrorism and intelligence expert, describes,

. . . the government faced two different major insurgent groups: the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), together with its military arm, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA); and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), with its military wing, the Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA). . . . In November 1973, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) R. H. Reid- Daly was tasked with forming the Selous Scouts as a pseudo-guerrilla force. Its original membership came largely from army trackers, and its cover throughout most of its existence was as a tracking unit.<sup>5</sup>

The Selous Scouts conducted operations against insurgent leadership and created the necessary information advantage for the Rhodesian Government to influence the population and reduce insurgent resources and sanctuary.<sup>6</sup> The Selous Scouts were the most effective counter-insurgency tool employed by the Rhodesian Government, accounting for 68 percent of total insurgent casualties, and effectively neutralized government opposition.

Foreign governments have also conducted pseudo-operations in their colonies or territories of interest. Portugal conducted numerous variations of pseudo-operations during their counter-insurgency efforts in the 1960s and '70s against non-loyalists in their African colonies. The British conducted variations of pseudo-operations with some degree of success against Chinese Communist insurgents during their Malaya campaign, and later during the 1952 Kenya campaign against the tribal Mau-Mau insurgents.<sup>7</sup> However, the United States has never publicly conducted successful pseudo-operations.

The United States should consider conducting pseudo-operations to reach into denied areas of a terrorist's political sanctuary. Swift execution of individuals without due process and authoritarian mandate of collateral damage may prove effective methods of counter-terrorism in states such as China and North Korea; however, the leading countries of the free world cannot employ these methods without inviting additional attacks and undermining centuries of accepted values. This matter is further complicated by the consideration of the United States conducting pseudo-operations in another's sovereign territory. United States domestic laws and policies and international laws such as the Law of Land Warfare<sup>8</sup> and the Geneva Convention<sup>9</sup> prescribe

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence E. Cline, 2005. "Pseudo operations and counterinsurgency lessons from other countries." Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS61435> (accessed March 2, 2010), 9, 10.

<sup>6</sup> For details on this conflict see Lieutenant Colonel R. F. Reid-Daly, *Pamwe Chete: The Legend of the Selous Scouts* (Weltevreden Park, South Africa: Covos-Day Books, 1999). Or J.K. Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia* (Kent: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1985).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account of British action against the Mau Mau, see Frank Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-gangs* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> The U.S. Army's Field Manual 27-10, *The Law of Land Warfare*, "provide[s] authoritative guidance to military personnel on the customary and treaty law applicable to the conduct of warfare . . ."

<sup>9</sup> The Geneva Convention refers to International agreements of 1949 and consists of treaties and protocols that establish standards in international law for humanitarian treatment of victims in war. The International Committee

standard methods of behavior and employment for government forces; these would guide the operational requirement to create the appearance of a terrorist organization without employing the illegal and immoral methods of the terrorists. Therefore, creating organizations that have the appearance of terrorist methodology is the legal and moral course of action for the United States. Arguably, hiring former insurgents and terrorists to behave in a manner similar to their previous enterprise has moral implications that bear further discussion in a different forum. However, pseudo operations by definition are conducted in a manner that has the appearance of wrongdoing without prescribing to the terrorist method of action and betraying the salient ideals of the United States. Pseudo-operations have proven effective when conducted with careful planning, with strict oversight from a decentralized point of command and control to minimize errant behavior, state-sponsored resources, and can effectively attract the attention and interaction from legitimate terror organizations seeking assistance, as the case studies and effects of pseudo-operations previously highlighted.

Although the United States has not conducted pseudo-operations, the infrastructure exists for the creation of pseudo-operation task forces operating against operational or strategic threats. The military and government maintain existing skill sets that are not only conducive, but, indeed, critical to the conduct of pseudo-operations if correctly leveraged against the pseudo-operations mission.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of a Joint Interagency Task Force for a finite period of time in order to conduct counter-terror pseudo-operations is a realistic course of action. A Pseudo-Operations Task Force would operationally enhance United States foreign policy efforts with a new capability that may prove effective when added to the spectrum of flexible options. It would be foolish to argue that the conduct of pseudo-operations would not have potential negative consequences or some measure of collateral damage. For example, the Selous Scouts had regular setbacks when operations yielded collateral damage or junior leaders (“turned” insurgents) went rogue. However, the cost of the failure to employ all available methods to prevent catastrophic attacks against the United States and the democratic free world is too high to discount consideration for a proven method of active and passive defense against otherwise untouchable sanctuaries.

The brief case studies of the Cheka, Rhodesia, Malaya and the Mau Mau, and others prove that pseudo-operations have relevance in the counter-terror and counter-insurgent conflicts against irreconcilable extremists or terrorists. The United States has been forced into a position of more active counter-terrorism, and maintains an obligation to neutralize threats by all means allowable by our constitution and international laws. The pseudo-operations effort would supplement existing operations and foreign policy initiatives, and likely follows the intent of a United States National Security Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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of the Red Cross describes the Geneva Convention at the following Website:  
<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/genevaconventions>

<sup>10</sup> Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peacekeeping* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1971).

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