Sorry, Charlie. This Is Michael Vickers's War

by Ann Scott Tyson via rialator - Washington Post *Sunday, Dec 30 2007, 5:26pm*
international / imperialism / other press

December 28, 2007

> In the Pentagon's newly expanded Special Operations office, a suite of sterile gray cubicles on the "C" ring of the third floor, Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael G. Vickers is working to implement the U.S. military's highest-priority plan: a global campaign against terrorism that reaches far beyond Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mike 'gung fuckin ho' Vickers

The wide-ranging plan details the targeting of al-Qaeda-affiliated networks around the world and explores how the United States should retaliate in case of another major terrorist attack. The most critical aspect of the plan, Vickers said in a recent interview, involves U.S. Special Operations forces working through foreign partners to uproot and fight terrorist groups.

Vickers's job also spans the modernization of nuclear forces for deterrence and retaliation, and the retooling of conventional forces to combat terrorism -- a portfolio so expansive that he and some Pentagon officials once jokingly referred to his efforts as the "take-over-the-world plan," one official said.

Vickers, a former Green Beret and CIA operative, was the principal strategist for the biggest covert program in CIA history: the paramilitary operation that drove the Soviet army out of Afghanistan in the 1980s. The movie "Charlie Wilson's War," released last weekend, portrays Vickers in that role, in which he directed an insurgent force of 150,000 Afghan fighters and controlled an annual budget of more than $2 billion in current dollars.

Today, as the top Pentagon adviser on counterterrorism strategy, Vickers exudes the same assurance about defeating terrorist groups as he did as a 31-year-old CIA paramilitary officer assigned to Afghanistan, where he convinced superiors that with the right strategy and weapons, the ragtag Afghan insurgents could win. "I am just as confident or more confident we can prevail in the war on terror," Vickers, 54, said in a recent interview, looking cerebral behind thick glasses but with an energy and build reminiscent of the high school quarterback he once was. "Not a lot of people thought we could drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan."

Vickers joined the Pentagon in July to oversee the 54,000-strong Special Operations Command (Socom), based in Tampa, which is growing faster than any other part of the U.S. military. Socom's budget has doubled in recent years, to $6 billion for 2008, and the command is to add 13,000 troops to its ranks by 2011.

Senior Pentagon and military officials regard Vickers as a rarity -- a skilled strategist who is both creative and pragmatic. "He tends to think like a gangster," said Jim Thomas, a former senior defense planner who worked with Vickers. "He can understand trends then change the rules of the game so they are advantageous for your side."

Vickers's outlook was shaped in the CIA and Special Forces, which he joined off the street through a "direct enlistment" program in 1973. In the 10th Special Forces Group, he trained year-round for a guerrilla war against the Soviet Union. One scenario he prepared for: to parachute into enemy territory with a small nuclear weapon strapped to his leg, and then position it to halt the Red Army.

Vickers recalled that the nuclear devices did not seem that small, "particularly when you are in an aircraft with one of them or it is attached to your body." Was it a suicide mission? "I certainly hoped not," Vickers said.

An expert in martial arts, parachuting and weapons, and second in his class at Officer Candidate School, Vickers was also fluent in Czech and Spanish, which made him overqualified when he joined the CIA's paramilitary unit in 1983. Soon after, he received a citation for combat in Grenada.

But Vickers's greatest influence was in the clinically precise way he reassessed the potential of Afghan guerrilla forces and prescribed the right mix of weaponry to attack Soviet weaknesses. This brash plan to create a force of "techno-guerrillas" able to fight year-round called for exponentially more money, which through sheer force of logic Vickers was able to obtain.

Today Vickers's plan to build a global counterterrorist network is no less ambitious. The plan is focused on a list of 20 "high-priority" countries, with Pakistan posing a central preoccupation for Vickers, who said al-Qaeda sanctuaries in the country's western tribal areas are a serious threat to the United States. The list also includes Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Yemen, Somalia and Iran, and Vickers hints that some European countries could be on it. Beyond that, the plan covers another 29 "priority" countries, as well as "other countries" that Vickers does not name.

"It's not just the Middle East. It's not just the developing world. It's not just nondemocratic countries -- it's a global problem," he said. "Threats can emanate from Denmark, the United Kingdom, you name it."

The plan deploys a variety of elite troops around the world, including about 80 to 90 12-man teams of Army Special Forces soldiers who are skilled in foreign languages and at working with indigenous forces. Today, those forces are heavily concentrated in Iraq and Afghanistan, but as their numbers grow, they will increase their presence in other countries.

"The war on terror is fundamentally an indirect war. . . . It's a war of partners . . . but it also is a bit of the war in the shadows, either because of political sensitivity or the problem of finding terrorists," Vickers said. "That's why the Central Intelligence Agency is so important . . . and our Special Operations forces play a large role."

Vickers is pressing Congress to double "train and equip" funding from levels approved in recent years for the military. The funds, which total $325 million for fiscal 2007, allow the U.S. military and

Special Operations forces to pay indigenous fighters and paramilitaries who work with them in gathering intelligence, hunting terrorists, fomenting guerrilla warfare or putting down an insurgency.

The funds are "very important . . . so we can move rather rapidly to train and equip foreign security forces" and more will be needed, Vickers told senators at his confirmation hearing in July. "If you don't have close cooperation, you can't fight the war," he said later.

But while local forces can be far more effective in countering terrorism in their regions, creating the forces must be done carefully, said Thomas, the former defense planner. "The last thing we want to do is create a bunch of right-wing goon squads that go out and shoot jihadists with very little legitimacy."

Vickers is also arguing for billions of dollars in new technology: specialized stealthy aircraft able to fly over countries undetected, unmanned aerial vehicles and other equipment for distant and close-up surveillance, and technology to "tag" and "track" individuals and cars for long distances over time.

Finally, Vickers seeks authority for more flexible and rapid "detailing" that would allow Special Operations forces, in larger numbers, to be seconded to the CIA and allowed to work under agency rules.

"It's striking to see how quickly he moves through large amounts of information" and then gives guidance how to get things done, said Kalev Sepp, deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations, who works under Vickers. "He knows the key players on Capitol Hill. . . . He understands what level of general officer has to be contacted to make decisions," Sepp said.

But with just over one year left in the Bush administration, Vickers is impatient with bureaucratic infighting within the military and between the Pentagon and other agencies, current and former officials said. One official noted that it took Socom about three years to write the counterterrorism plan, and two years for the administration to approve a classified "execute order" against al-Qaeda.

Vickers, who has advised President Bush on Iraq strategy, is convinced that more U.S. troops are not enough to solve the conflict in Iraq and that working with local forces is the best long-term strategy for both Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Its imperative that the Iraqis provide . . . security, so transitioning to an indirect approach is critical," he said. "The surge has been phenomenally effective . . . but not sufficient," he said, adding that he thinks that without political change the effects of the troop buildup "will dissipate."

Working with proxy forces will also enable the United States to extend and sustain its influence, something it failed to do in Afghanistan, he said. "After this great victory and after a million Afghans died, we basically exited that region and Afghanistan just spun into chaos," he said.

"It's imperative that we not do that again," he said.

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Cleaves Alternative News. http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-861.html