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A Toll of Dirty Tricks

The games that the Central Intelligence Agency plays have produced a terrible toll in human suffering. The consequences have been catastrophic for forlorn peoples from the Khambas in the Himalayas to the Kurds in the Mideast.

The painful details are buried deep in the CIA's vaults, but enough can be pieced together to tell the story of how the CIA exploited unsophisticated peoples for political, economic and military purposes.

The intent, presumably, was to bolster U.S. power and influence around the world. Yet the results have been the opposite. This has led some policymakers to suggest that the CIA should give up its dirty tricks and restrict its activities to gathering intelligence.

In the early 1960s, for example, the CIA recruited Tibetan tribesmen, known as Khambas, who fled the Red Chinese into the mountains of Nepal. The Khambas were brought to the United States for training and then outfitted with American saddles, small arms and other provisions suitable for mountain warfare.

At the instigation of the CIA, the galloping Khambas would swoop down on Chinese military encampments in Tibet. The tribesmen were led by the CIA to believe they would reconquer their lost homeland with American help. They continued their harassments against the Chinese sporadically for a decade until the CIA lost interest. Then the proud Khambas, without CIA supplies to sustain them, straggled down from the mountains into the valleys of Nepal. They subsist today as pitiful and unwanted refugees.

During the mid-1960s, the CIA persuaded primitive Vietnamese tribesmen, called Montagnards, to exchange their bows and arrows for guns and grenades. They were recruited as scouts and border guards for the U.S. forces. Their reward: As the war spluttered to an end, thousands of Montagnards were herded into refugee camps where many perished from malnutrition, exposure, tuberculosis and pneumonia.

In Laos, the CIA formed a 14,000-man army of Meo tribesmen to battle the Pathet Lao Communists. As the war dragged on, the Meo ranks were severely depleted, and even 10-year-olds were recruited. The triumphant Pathet Lao drove tens of thousands of Meos from their villages. Yet today, the pathetic remnants of the mercenary army continue to fight the secret war that

the CIA started. According to intelligence reports, the Pathet Lao has called on North Vietnam to help them root the remaining Meos out of their mountain hideouts.

Perhaps no primitive people have been so cruelly manipulated, however, as the Kurds who lived in the mountainous region of the Middle East where Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and the Soviet Union come together. The Kurds became pawns on Henry Kissinger's chessboard in May 1972.

Kissinger looked upon Iran as the geopolitical base for U.S. operations in the area and developed a close relationship with the Shah. The Shah, in turn, was involved in border and navigation

disputes with Iraq. He also felt threatened by Iraq's close relationship with the Soviet Union. Therefore, he sought to stir up the simmering struggle between the Kurds and the Iraqis.

In May 1972, Kissinger brought his mentor, then-President Richard Nixon to Teheran for a meeting with the Shah. At the Shah's insistent request, the two American leaders agreed to arm the Kurds for warfare against the

Iraqis. The CIA, to its credit, resisted this particular scheme. But Nixon and Kissinger had made their decision.

During the months that followed, the CIA smuggled some \$16 million worth of untraceable Chinese and Soviet arms through Iran to the Kurds, who fought the Iraqis to a standstill. The jubilant Kissinger dispatched a telegram through CIA channels to the Kurdish leader, Gen. Mustafa Barzani, on Feb. 22, 1975.

"My dear General," Kissinger's message began. "I want you to know of our admiration for you and your people and for the valiant effort you are making. . . . I am convinced that secrecy has been of paramount importance in maintaining our ability to do what we have done; it is only for this reason—plus our concern for your personal safety—that I hesitate to suggest a personal meeting here with you."

No more than two weeks later, the Shah suddenly announced he had come to terms with Iraq. One of the terms, apparently, was the termination of American-Iranian support for the Kurds. Overnight, this support dried up; without the military wherewithal, the Kurds were overpowered. Thousands poured into Iran, helpless refugees, without bullets for the guns the CIA had given them. Barzani pleaded with Nixon and Kissinger for humanitarian help. His appeals were ignored.

Eventually, a token 400 Kurdish refugees were admitted to the United States and 300 more visas have now been granted. But last January, the State Department also granted visas to an official Iraqi delegation to call upon the Kurds in America, ostensibly to persuade them to come home.

The delegation, accompanied by armed State Department bodyguards, visited Kurds in California, Florida and North Dakota. There was no outright intimidation or harassment of the Kurds, so far as we can learn. But the Iraqi visit alarmed them, and now that they are known to the Iraqis, the Kurdish refugees fear for the fate of their relatives in Iraq.

Meanwhile, Barzani, stricken with cancer, has taken up residence in Washington's Virginia suburbs. He has written twice to President Carter for help for his people. His only reply has been a routine, brush-off note from an aide.

Footnote: A State Department official told us the Iraqi delegation was admitted to the United States only after intense deliberation and stern warnings to the Iraqi representatives that no intimidation of the Kurds would be tolerated. Aside from the armed bodyguards, which the Iraqis requested, the delegation was given "no support whatsoever," he said.