

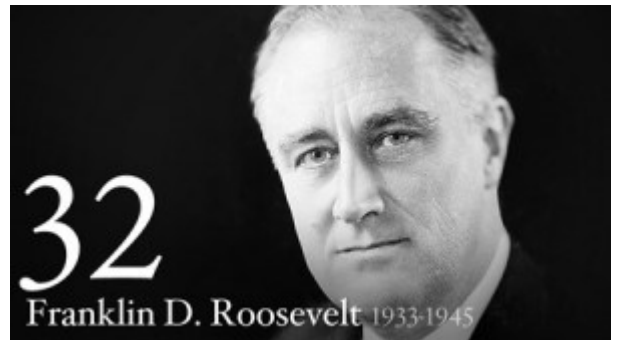
Dismantling FDR's Legacy

With Mitt Romney exposed as another disciple of Ayn Rand's gospel of makers and takers, Election 2012 is shaping up as a test of whether the United States will embrace the laissez-faire Gilded Age or uphold the New Deal with its middle-class values. Will Franklin Roosevelt be honored or rejected, asks Beverly Bandler.

By Beverly Bandler

The Republican Party wants to undo the legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and what is left of the New Deal. Many Republicans hated FDR when he was alive. They hate him still. They refuse to accept that he saved capitalism and that he genuinely believed that the government had a duty to serve 100 percent of the country's citizens, not only the 53 percent, or the 2 percent or the 1 percent.

According to a recently leaked video, GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney told a closed-door fundraiser in May that he thinks 47 percent of Americans are deadbeats who consider themselves "victims." In doing so, Romney revealed that he stands with his party's Social Darwinists and shares the worldview of fiction writer Ayn Rand.



As political scientist Alan Wolfe writes, that view "boils down to two propositions. One is that selfishness is the highest of moral virtues. The other is that the masses, above all resentful of success, are parasites living off the hard work of capitalists far superior to them in every way."

This current Republican leadership believes the U.S. should return to the *laissez-faire* days of the 1920s when, in spite of the post-World War I boom, more than half of the country's population was living below a minimum subsistence level and without any safety nets for the recurring economic crises.

The federal government did not intervene when the cycles of boom and bust ruined the lives of many Americans (including former Vice President Dick Cheney's grandfather and great-grandfather).

Between the starting point of the Depression in late 1929 and the 1932 election of FDR, Republican President Herbert Hoover's response was one of "dismal pessimism." He appeared so overwhelmed by the Depression that one observer remarked, "If you put a rose in Hoover's hand, it would wilt."

Hoover held to the conventional wisdom of the day that the crisis would simply have to resolve itself and that the government had no responsibility to do anything about it.

As Lawrence Davidson writes: "In the 132 years between 1797 and 1929, there was no effective regulation of the U.S. economy. No federal agencies existed to control corruption, fraud and exploitation on the part of the business class. Even during the Civil War, economic management on a national level was minimal and war profiteering common.

"As a result the country experienced 33 major economic downturns which impacted roughly 60 of the years in question. These included 22 recessions, four depressions, and seven economic 'panics' (bank runs and failures). ...

"The Great Depression was a real moment of truth for the capitalist West because it suggested to the open-minded that the free-market ideology was seriously flawed. Free-market practices had brought the economic system to the brink of collapse, and Russia's newly triumphant communists represented serious competition.

"So the question that had to be answered was how best to modify the capitalist system so as to preserve the position of the ruling elite. It was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who came up with an answer, at least for the United States.

"Through a series of economic and social experiments he crafted the New Deal and promoted the notion of the welfare state ... this was not socialism. In essence, the New Deal was capitalism with safety nets and subsidies...

"It has been 67 years since the end of WWII and during that time there have been 11 recessions impacting only 10 years of that time span. Most of these recessions have been mild affairs compared to the 33 that came prior to the onset of the Great Depression, and the welfare safety net has helped the hardest hit to survive. However, since the 1980s, the U.S. economy has become more unstable and some of the downturns more severe."

The Great Recession that began in late 2007 follows Ronald Reagan's deregulation fervor of the 1980s and fits more with the pattern of the pre-New Deal days. Now, the Republicans, in effect, want to impose a Herbert Hoover-style response to the current crisis by getting rid of President Barack Obama and electing Mitt

Romney.

In the Republicans' mythological age of the 1920s, there was great prosperity, which is true, but it was a prosperity that primarily benefited the rich. Wealth did not "trickle down" any better then than it has since the 1980s. In the 1920s in rural America, for example, nine out of every ten families lived without electricity.

The authoritarian and elitist Republicans don't want Americans to know this history (particularly since the New Deal put the Democrats in power from 1933 until 1952 and the party was the dominant influence until 1968) or to know that GOP conservative policies helped create the Great Depression as they did the current Great Recession (admittedly, in the latter they had help from those Democrats who have forgotten history as well).

Republicans reject government intervention as a threat to "liberty." They define "liberty" as the right for the powerful to get what they want, when they want, and how they want it with no restrictions. Today's Republicans want a return to the rule of privilege. No questions asked; no accounting required.

The Democratic Party needs to remember this history and its lessons, lessons that are relevant to the 2012 election.

That history tells us that at a moment of great crisis eight decades ago, a man who could not walk led a crippled nation out of the Great Depression and then brought the United States to the threshold of victory in World War II.

In doing this, Roosevelt changed the federal government's relationship to its people, creating a modern governing structure for a nation that soon would take the center of the world stage.

FDR's New Deal saved capitalism from itself and laid the foundation for America's Great Middle Class, which, in turn, drove the U.S. economy to unprecedented success and broad prosperity. Today's Republican Party doesn't want Americans to know this.

Beverly Bandler's public affairs career spans some 40 years. Her credentials include serving as president of the state-level League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands and extensive public education efforts in the Washington, D.C. area for 16 years. Bandler attended Sarah Lawrence College ('59) and has a master's degree in Public Administration from George Washington University ('82). She writes from Mexico.

Jesus: Redistributionist-in-Chief

From the Archive: Christian conservatives are cheering Mitt Romney's attack on a 14-year-old comment by Barack Obama endorsing a limited "redistribution" of wealth, but they ignore that Jesus called for a far more radical wealth redistribution and it may have led to his crucifixion, as Rev. Howard Bess wrote in 2011.

By the Rev. Howard Bess (First published on Sept. 4, 2011)

According to Luke's gospel, the beginning of the ministry of Jesus as a reputational rabbi was marked by his public reading of a passage from the Isaiah scroll. His declaration was that a year special to God had arrived, a Jubilee Year that would redistribute wealth and end the economic persecution of the poor.

A key part of understanding Jesus involves his belief in this Year of Jubilee. According to Levitical Law, all land was owned by God. So, the people who controlled the land and farmed it were stewards/servants, but according to Leviticus, they never really owned the land.

Land could be bought and sold but only for a limited time. Plus, the holders of land were under some strict rules. Every seventh year the land could not be farmed, meaning the land had a Sabbath year when it rested.

At the end of the seventh seven-year cycle (i.e. 49 years), the Levitical Law required that all the people start over. Land was to be completely redistributed. This 50th year was called the Year of Jubilee. Other important things took place. All slaves were set free and all debts were canceled. The Levitical Law envisioned a new day for everyone.

Over the years the Israelites found ways of reinterpreting the law and avoided the keeping of the Year of Jubilee. People who had gained control of large land holdings were closely allied with the priests who ran the Jerusalem Temple.

The prophet Isaiah (who lived in the Eighth Century BC) despised the rich and the powerful. A recurring theme in Isaiah is a call to celebrate the Year of Jubilee honestly. Many today would call him the ultimate socialist. As far as anyone can tell, the Year of Jubilee has never been celebrated.

Jesus lived at a time of a concentration of wealth when working farmers had completely lost control of their land, which was owned by very wealthy men who lived in large cities some miles away. Under the prevailing economic system, the

farmers became poorer and poorer.

Often, the farmers had to leave the farm and became day-laborers who worked at the mercy of absentee owners and their local enforcers. The greed of absentee land owners and the plight of poverty-stricken farmers form the backdrop of the entire ministry of Jesus.

When Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry as a reputational rabbi read the particular passage from Isaiah, his entire audience understood what he was saying. He was calling for the celebration of the Year of Jubilee.

Jesus made his statement in a minor village to a group of people who had become powerless under the economic onslaught of the rich. Jesus was declaring that the new day had arrived. At last justice would be established.

It was a brash statement partly because Jesus was not a trained rabbi. His position as rabbi would not have been accepted outside of a small area in northern Palestine. According to the passage, he made his statement in the town (Nazareth) in which he grew up.

Jesus had spent his early manhood attending the local synagogue meetings as an active participant. A small village such as Nazareth had too few people to merit a trained rabbi, so the regular Sabbath meetings were led by lay people.

At Sabbath meetings, the Scriptures (Old Testament) were read, discussed and argued. Jesus was the leader that emerged from the group. His reputation grew as he became their "reputational" rabbi. Jesus embraced the Isaiah writings, and the Isaiah perspective had become the eyes with which he read and understood the Law and will of God.

(This understanding of Jesus's radical message, challenging the power structure on behalf of the poor, puts into context his fateful decision to take his protests to Jerusalem where the scriptures describe him riding in on a humble donkey and confronting the money changers at the Temple. It also helps explain the determination of the religious and political elites of Jerusalem to have him crucified.)

Other Injustices

This column is the arrival of new days as an intrinsic part of the Christian message. Jubilee is any and every day when justice triumphs. And the message of justice is not restricted to issues of economic injustice or the excessive power of the rich. It also applies to social justice.

It has been more than four decades since the Stonewall riots started the

revolution for gay acceptance in America. The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in New York City that was regularly raided by the police. On June 28, 1969, the men at the Stonewall Inn had had enough. The resulting riots lasted several days and inspired the emergence of gay rights organizations across the country.

Within seven years, I felt it necessary to face the issue of gay acceptance in our churches, writing my first essay about acceptance of gay people in our congregation. I shared my call for acceptance with my congregation. A new day had arrived. It was a day that demanded justice for a persecuted and down-trodden group of people. The old ways were unacceptable.

I believed it was and is the calling of our churches to declare the arrival of the new day. But I have been sorrowed that so many Christian churches have chosen darkness rather than light. I am chagrined by my fellow Christian clergy who have kept silent about justice for our gay friends when they should have been witnessing to the new day of Jubilee.

However, I am also pleased with the large number of churches and clergy who have been declaring the arrival of the new day of acceptance for gay people in the family of God. We have come a long way.

Jesus had the courage to apply Torah (the will of God) to the vicious economic injustice that had developed in his own day. He challenged injustice and declared a new day. Challenging injustice and claiming a new day for everyone are the calling of every person who calls Jesus "Lord."

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How to Save the GOP

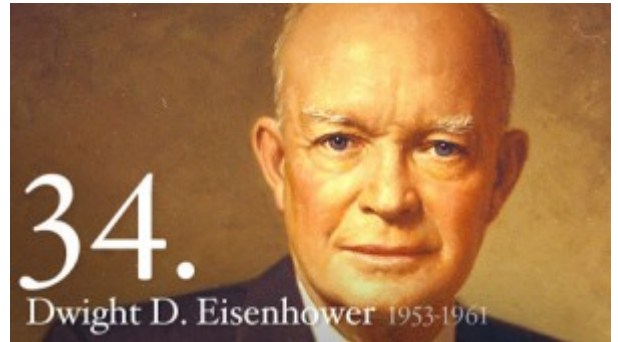
Exclusive: The only practical way to get the U.S. back on track economically is to raise taxes on the rich and use the money to rebuild the country. But anti-government extremists have taken over the Republican Party and won't let go. So, what can be done to save the GOP from itself, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Having been raised in a family of pro-business Republicans in Massachusetts, I sometimes wonder what it would take to restore the GOP to its earlier status as a reasonable and responsible political organization like it, more or less, was

during the days of Dwight Eisenhower.

Back then, the Republican Party was skeptical of too much government but recognized government's vital role in building a strong nation. Eisenhower and Republicans of his time would have understood President Barack Obama's comment about the importance of publicly financed roads, bridges and other infrastructure in helping business succeed.



Those Republicans wouldn't have ripped the "you didn't build that" line out of context, attached the "that" to the wrong antecedent the building of individual businesses and then made the distortion the centerpiece of a national convention.

Unlike Eisenhower's GOP, today's breed of Republican displays a willful know-nothing-ism, a determination to wallow in a swamp of anti-intellectualism and made-up facts. In my youth, the Republicans were considered the more reasonable ones.

These troubling Republican trends have gotten worse over several decades but only recently has this reality penetrated the consciousness of the Washington Establishment, finally prompting two committed centrists, Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, to detect the reality.

Earlier this year, they penned a Washington Post Outlook article entitled "Let's just say it: the Republicans are the problem": "In our past writings, we have criticized both parties when we believed it was warranted. Today, however, we have no choice but to acknowledge that the core of the problem lies with the Republican Party.

"The GOP has become an insurgent outlier in American politics. It is ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

At the top, Republican leaders from Ayn Rand ideologues to neoconservative warmongers believe in elitist concepts like "perception management," i.e. using

lies and propaganda to manipulate the rank-and-file. Among the rank-and-file, there's almost a pride in being manipulated.

So, despite all evidence, high percentages of Republicans believe that Obama is a Muslim born in Kenya, that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction, that Saddam Hussein was involved in the 9/11 attacks, that the science on global warming is a hoax. Instead of anger over being misled, today's adherents to GOP orthodoxy react to the truth by hugging the lies more tightly.

If this were the behavior of some fringe group on the Right or the Left, it might not matter much. But the Republican Party is part of the governing structure of the United States, the world's most powerful nation with a bristling arsenal of nuclear weapons and a vast array of other exotic weapons.

Bolstered by an extraordinary propaganda system reaching from newspapers, magazines and books to radio, TV and well-funded Internet sites the Republicans have shown they can win elections, especially in times of fear and anger, and cause great harm from starting unnecessary wars to tanking the global economy.

George W. Bush, one recent example of Republican arrogant ignorance, took the United States from an era of general peace, prosperity and, yes, budget surpluses to a desperate time of war, financial collapse and trillion-dollar deficits. Bush's ineptitude is still being felt by millions of jobless Americans and a struggling world economy.

Yet, the Republicans and their impressive propaganda machine have convinced large numbers of Americans that what is needed is a bigger dose of George W. Bush in the person of Mitt Romney, who, despite his mincing steps contrasted to Bush's swagger, represents Bush's policies on steroids, i.e., more tax cuts, more global belligerence.

Romney is trusting that the combination of true-believers and the truly confused will get him over the hump, and some polls show that he remains within range of reaching his goal, the White House. But what would happen if he gets his "50.1 percent"?

Misdiagnosing the Problem

Though Romney sees his experience as a venture capitalist as his top qualification to be President, he misdiagnoses the biggest problem facing the U.S. economy, a lack of consumer demand. That resulted from the middle class suffering three-plus decades of decline, mostly under GOP tax and trade policies favoring the rich and the outsourcers.

The crisis reached a critical point in the last two years of George W. Bush's presidency when the ability of middle-class families to borrow against their home equity was devastated by the financial crash, massive layoffs and a drastic drop in home prices.

That forced millions of American consumers to forego purchases and left manufacturers with little incentive to ramp up production. Instead, companies kept trillions of dollars on the sidelines, seeing no reason to send their cash into the game.

Yet, what does Romney advocate as a solution? He wants another 20 percent tax cut aimed primarily at the wealthy. But non-partisan budget experts say the Romney plan would require higher taxes on middle-class families. In other words, Romney is likely to depress consumer spending even more.

Another mistaken judgment is spelled out in his campaign book, *No Apology*, where he describes the key challenge confronting the U.S. economy as "productivity," i.e. the ability to produce more goods per hour of work.

He wrote: "Productivity is so central a concept, so crucial an ingredient to national well-being, that a focus on productivity should be a constant in the media and in the minds of citizens."

But that's not entirely true. A healthy economy depends on a mix of factors, including a strong middle class that can afford to buy items being manufactured. If an economy raises productivity, it will still stagnate if people can't afford to buy the products.

Even the most efficient factory that makes something that no one can afford will soon go out of business. That was the insight of car manufacturer Henry Ford who insisted on paying his assembly-line workers enough so they could buy his cars. On a macro level, the same is true for countries. Productivity without demand is a recipe for failure.

In the Great Depression, the federal government expanded on Henry Ford's insight with New Deal programs to help the unemployed get back on their feet. After World War II, other initiatives were designed to benefit returning war veterans and to build the country.

In essence, the Great American Middle Class was a creation of the federal government, through programs like the GI Bill, laws to protect unions, and major investments in transportation, power generation and science. That era's Republicans might have been more cautious about government spending, but many projects had bipartisan support.

This golden era of the U.S. economy occurred while the top marginal tax rate for the wealthy ranged from 70 percent to as high as 91 percent. During the Eisenhower administration, the rich got to keep less than 10 percent of their top tranche of income.

This tax money was then “redistributed” to make America stronger and more prosperous. In the process, many businesses succeeded.

While the 70 to 91 percent top marginal tax rates might be excessive in today’s more fluid world where the rich can offshore themselves as well as their money, the excessive tax cutting that Republicans have pushed since Ronald Reagan’s presidency now down to 15 percent for capital gains on investments hasn’t achieved a healthy economy. Quite the opposite.

A Needed Pragmatism

So, the pragmatic approach would be to look at this history and raise taxes on the rich to some reasonable level President Bill Clinton set the top rate at 39.6 percent while investing some of that money in projects that can hire the unemployed and give the United States, once again, a world-class infrastructure.

In other words, use the tax structure to transfer some super-profits from the U.S. owners of foreign factories and from businessmen who have profited from government-backed technology to create middle-class jobs for Americans, who can then buy stuff.

If done wisely by putting people to work on building infrastructure, advancing research, and educating the U.S. population this “redistribution” can have multiple benefits, not just expanding the middle class but helping new businesses prosper.

That was what happened with President Eisenhower’s Interstate Highway System, with President John F. Kennedy’s space program (which spurred the development of computers and microprocessors), and with any number of other government-sponsored innovations, from pharmaceuticals to the Internet.

But that is the opposite of what Romney, the Tea Party and other anti-government extremists want to do. Indeed, “redistribution” has become Romney’s new curse word in the campaign, citing a 14-year-old clip of Obama as a state senator supporting some level of redistribution to give everyone “a shot.”

For Romney and today’s Republicans, it’s all about rewarding the “winners” and forgetting the “losers,” the “47 percent” whom Romney disparaged in a secretly recorded meeting with donors. These anti-government zealots want a return to the Social Darwinism of the Gilded Age and the “laissez-faire” model that failed.

After all, facts and logic have little place in the land of modern Republicanism. Instead of recognizing the wisdom accumulated over the past century reinforced by the harsh realities of Bush's crash of 2008 the GOP insists on doubling-down on bad bets. More tax cuts tilted to the rich, less regulation of Wall Street, more "free trade."

The simple truth is that the only way to rebuild the Great American Middle Class and to begin getting the federal debt under control is by taxing the rich more. Yet, today's brand of Republican Party won't take even the smallest step in that direction, citing pledges made to anti-tax radical Grover Norquist.

So what can be done? How do you save a party that has embraced anti-government extremism, that proposes tax cuts as the cure for all ills, that rejects science if it goes against ideology, that promotes crazy conspiracy theories to delegitimize opponents, that makes its case to the American people through outright lies, that tries to win elections through racially tinged voter suppression, and that relies on TV ad carpet-bombings to get votes?

How can the GOP be salvaged when its philosophical leaders are the likes of Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter? How can Americans intervene to remake the Republican Party into a constructive and necessary counterweight to the Democrats?

The only answer appears to be a series of crushing electoral defeats for this Republican Party. Not just one or two disappointing cycles but a consistent repudiation of this extremist organization until its more moderate elements can reclaim leadership and redirect not simply repackage the policies.

Like a person suffering from a violent split personality, the traditional Republican Party cannot coexist with the right-wing radicalism that has taken over my dad's GOP. Only a determined intervention from the outside from the American electorate over several election cycles can give the old Republicans a chance to reemerge.

If the Tea Partiers and the neocons are repudiated again and again, the Republican Party could get back in touch with its earlier traditions of thoughtful policies, those bipartisan ideas that helped build a great nation.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

A Taliban Gain in Afghanistan

After 11 years, the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan like the ill-fated war in Iraq is grinding toward a strategic defeat for Washington. The latest setback is the suspension of joint operations with Afghan troops after a rash of killing of NATO trainers by Afghan soldiers, write Shah Noori and Gareth Porter for Inter Press Service.

By Shah Noori and Gareth Porter

Sharply increased attacks on U.S. and other NATO personnel by Afghan security forces, reflecting both infiltration of and Taliban influence on those forces, appear to have outflanked the U.S.-NATO command's strategy for maintaining control of the insurgency.

The Taliban-instigated "insider attacks," which have already killed 51 NATO troops in 2012 (already 45 percent more than in all of 2011), have created such distrust of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and national police that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) command has suspended joint operations by NATO forces with Afghan security units smaller than the 800-strong battalion of Kandak and vowed to limit them in the future.

ISAF had intended to carry out intensive partnering and advising of ANA and police units below battalion level through 2012 to get them ready to take responsibility for Afghan security. Now, however, that strategy appears to have been disrupted by the insider attacks, and Afghan military and civilian officials are seriously concerned.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta sought to minimize the crisis in U.S. war strategy Tuesday by calling the inside attacks on NATO troops the "last gasp" of a Taliban insurgency that has been "unable to regain any of the territory that they have lost." The "last gasp" phrase recalls then Vice-President Dick Cheney's infamous 2005 claim that the Iraqi insurgency was "in its last throes."

But Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the attacks "a very serious threat to the campaign" in an interview on Saturday. "You can't whitewash it," said Dempsey. "We can't convince ourselves that we just have to work harder to get through it. Something has to change."

The ISAF command also tried to downplay the significance of the decision, portraying it as "temporary" and not unlike previous adjustments to high threat conditions. The ISAF press release vowed that it would "return to normal operations as soon as conditions warrant."

But the Taliban have power over whether conditions return to a level that would allow resumption of the joint operations between NATO and Afghan forces, which have been touted as the key to preparing the ANA and the police to cope with the Taliban on their own. The Taliban have achieved a strategic coup by creating a high degree of U.S.-NATO fear and mistrust of the Afghan forces.

Even if some joint operations are resumed, moreover, they will be limited to those approved by regional commanders, according to the new policy. And White House spokesman Jay Carney appeared to contradict the ISAF "return to normal operations" language, telling reporters, "Most partnering and advising will now be at the battalion level and above."

ISAF Commander Gen. John Allen has tried in the past to minimize the role of the Taliban in the insider killings, suggesting that as little as 10 percent of the Afghan soldiers and police who killed NATO troops were Taliban infiltrators. Most of the killers acted out of personal anger at their Western advisers, Allen argued.

But Allen also conceded that, in addition to Taliban infiltrators, some Afghan troops may have acted out of "radicalization or having become susceptible to extremist ideology."

New evidence suggests that the Taliban had influenced a number of ANA and police who killed NATO personnel. Last month, the Taliban's media arm released a video showing a Taliban commander in eastern Kunar province welcoming two ANA soldiers who they said had killed U.S. and Afghan troops earlier in the year. Based on the video, the Long War Journal judged that neither of the soldiers had been a Taliban infiltrator but had made the decision in response to Taliban urging.

Douglas Ollivant, who was senior counterinsurgency adviser to the U.S. commander of the regional command for eastern Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011, told IPS the evidence indicates that most Afghan personnel who killed NATO troops and were not already Taliban when they joined the security forces had later become "de facto infiltrators."

In the Afghan rural social context, the local Taliban and the Afghan troops and soldiers "all know each other," Ollivant said. "It's not like they are from two different planets."

Lt. Col. Danny Davis, who traveled extensively across Afghanistan during his 2010-2011 tour of duty there, found evidence that the Taliban had indeed achieved influence over the Afghan security forces who were supposed to be helping U.S.-NATO forces root out the insurgents.

In a draft report he wrote earlier this year, which had circulated within the

U.S. government and was leaked to Rolling Stone magazine, Davis wrote, "In almost every combat outpost I visited this year, the troopers reported to me they had intercepted radio or other traffic between the ANSF and the local Taliban making essentially mini-nonaggression deals with each other."

In Zharay district of Kandahar province, Davis wrote, he found the Afghan security forces were "in league with the Taliban."

Taliban spiritual and political leader Mullah Omar issued a statement on Aug. 16 saying the Taliban had "cleverly infiltrated the ranks of the enemy according to the plan given them last year." Omar also called on Afghan security personnel to "defect and join the Taliban as matter of religious duty."

For many months the U.S. has been putting intense pressure on the Afghan government to prevent such killings by "revetting" the personnel files of ANA and police personnel. Just last week, the government announced that it had removed "hundreds" of security forces from its ranks.

But there is very little the Afghan government can do to ensure against Afghan troops turning against NATO. "Vetting is virtually impossible in a place like Afghanistan," former British commander Col. Richard Kemp told the Guardian.

There are no detailed files on the young recruits into the army and police. The only information on the vast majority of new recruits is a statement from village elders vouching for them.

Retired Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer, senior fellow and director of communications at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, told IPS that U.S. officers in Afghanistan don't believe the Afghan government's efforts to identify potential Taliban infiltrators or sympathizers will slow the pace of insider killings. "They are all saying it isn't going to have any effect," said Shaffer.

The decision by ISAF to pull back from joint operations with smaller Afghan units is regarded by Afghan officials and observers as a major boost to the Taliban and a potentially serious blow to the already shaky ANA and police.

Retired ANA Gen Atiqullah Amarkhail acknowledged in an interview with IPS that insider attacks "have destroyed the NATO trust in the Afghan security forces." The halt in joint operations with Afghan security forces will "really embolden and raise the morale of the Taliban," he said. "The Taliban consider that they have achieved the goal they have been working for and are proud that they made coalition forces stop helping Afghan security forces."

Amarkhail said he doesn't believe the ANA will be able to conduct operations without the help of NATO forces, because of poor coordination among Afghan

security forces and its lack of modern weapons.

“If the foreign forces do not support and leave the Afghan Army in the present condition, things will get worse,” said Amarkhail. He expressed the fear that the result could be that different elements within the ANA will “turn their guns on each other.”

Dawoud Ahmadi, spokesman for Helmand Province Governor Mohammad Gulab Mangal, also expressed the fear that the ANA in the province will not be able to operate effectively against the Taliban if ISAF halts joint operations with the ANA at lower unit levels.

The spokesman told IPS, “We have problems in Helmand province, especially in the North. If NATO doesn’t help in conducting operations at lower level, the Afghan security forces will face problems, because they are not yet ready to launch operations on their own in that part of the province.”

Shah Noori reported from Kabul. Gareth Porter, an investigative historian and journalist specialising in U.S. national security policy, received the UK-based Gellhorn Prize for journalism for 2011 for articles on the U.S. war in Afghanistan. [This article originally appeared at Inter Press Service.]
