



CALL Lesson of the Day

SUBJECT: The Taliban Taranas: The Psychological Spark in Afghanistan

Theater: Afghanistan/OEF

Date: 30 July 2012

1. Observation: The Taliban Tarana is a distinctive type of Afghan poetry performed usually in Pashto by one or more vocalists without instrumental accompaniment and characterized by the melodic modes of local folk music. What do taranas have to do with our mission? Possible links to Inside the Wire Threat – Green on Blue.

2. Discussion: The Taliban imposed their conservative views in Afghanistan in the 1990's. One of those views was the banning of music. During the 1996-2001 rule of Afghanistan, taranas were allowed, while a total ban on conventional music was enforced.¹

CAAT's recent brief to COMIJC and COMISAF (July 2012), The Nexus of Taranas, five key tarana elements were discussed: (1) Pashtu poetry, (2) Taliban influenced and adopted as the Taliban signature for their resistance movement, (3) readily available to download from the internet, (4) embraced by Afghans, and an (5) effective destabilization to the ISAF mission.

Though the Taliban taranas do not present a direct correlation to Green on Blue incidents, there is a correlation to the potential of ANSF propensity to conduct a Green on Blue incident. It is believed that the Taliban is leveraging Green on Blue through the use of taranas.

In Nangarhar Province, an ANA soldier is thought to have been listening to Taliban Taranas on his cell phone right before turning on and attacking his CF trainers, killing six.² According to a high ranking GIRoA official working at the Ministry of Interior (MOI), all of the identified perpetrators of Green on Blue incidents had taranas on their cell phones. This official believed that listening to taranas provided the necessary emotional spark to trigger the fratricide incidents.³ Reports indicate that some ANSF are listening

¹ Naqib Ahmad Atal, Jalalabad, Afghanistan Today, Underground Anthems of War, June 20, 2011

² BBC News; Shift in Taliban tactics alarms Afghanistan government.

³ Information gathered by the author while interacting in native language with GIRoA officials, employees and local nationals.

to Taliban propaganda music on their mobile phones and watch Taliban produced music videos on their cell phones as well. Outside the wire in Taliban controlled areas, it is believed that young men are forced to listen to Taliban Taranas.

- Types of Taranas
 - There are four highly popular genres of TARANAS:
 - Wataniyya
 - Tura
 - Matamuna
 - Diniyya

Respectively, these taranas cover motives of homeland and patriotism, bravery and self-appraisal, mourning and religious themes. Wataniyya Tarana is the particular genre which is anecdotally linked to incidents of Green on Blue. The ability of the tarana ballads to strike at the heart of Afghans and psychologically trigger even non-combative Afghans into sympathizing with the resistance movement is astounding.

Technology has facilitated the availability and portability of taranas. Due to the ease of using digital messaging and mobile phone technology, tarana music videos are efficiently produced and easily distributed throughout the internet and downloaded to cell phones. Undeniably, the Taliban have fully embraced taranas as the signature message of their struggle. Excerpts from a Wataniyya Tarana:

Hey, White Banner⁴, wave now with dignity...
To Dasht-i Layl⁵i go fast with dignity...
Over those oppressed flap your wings with dignity...
Talk to that oppressed Talib with dignity:
Squalls of dust, shame and sorrow have fallen on your oppressors...
Well, if they killed Talib being in his young age and with dignity,
After they [i.e. the invaders] had gone, the lands of ancestors were kept
intact with dignity...
This land belonging to Islam will be

⁴ Taliban Flag a.k.a. the Flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

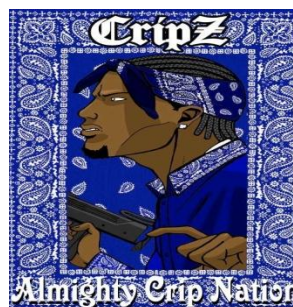
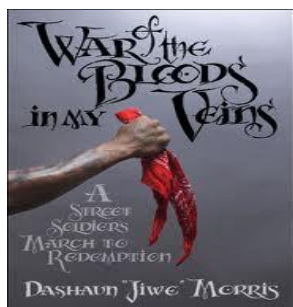
⁵ A desert strip west of Mazar-e-Sharif where within a period of few weeks in 1997, hundreds of starved Taliban POWs were massacred by forces loyal to Northern Alliance.

Every infidel and wayward here annihilated will be⁶

A photo montage is played with the tarana ballads. The images typically start off with a peaceful desert oasis scene and then progresses to scenes of Crusaders and the fierce brave Muslims defenders who fought against them. These scenes quickly progress to images of what may be perceived by Afghans as a modern day military invasion of Islamic land, to stacks of USD currency used to buy loyalty of the Afghan leader collaborators depicted with images of past and current Afghan leaders. The symbolism imposed by the Taliban tarana montage conjugates images of history, culture, a sense of what it means to be an Afghan, and to live in Afghanistan free if infidels.

3. Lessons Learned: The effectiveness of taranas in immediately manufacturing strong Islamic and nationalistic zeal in even the most ordinary and educated Afghans is undeniable. The CAAT advisor who presented the Taliban Tarana brief, while embedded within GIRoA institutions, personally witnessed multiple educated Afghans working with ISAF and Non-Government Organization (NGOs) reduced to tears from the emotional turmoil generated after listening to a Taliban produced tarana.

This resistance imagination is a significant cultural resource to those who seek to mobilize the Pashtuns to fight. In American terms, arguably, taranas are to Afghan insurgency what underground gangster rap is to inner-city violent gangs. They both lionize and perpetuate a certain lifestyle, ideology and provide pretext for behavioral norms.



4. Recommendation: US Forces and Coalition Forces should be provided with Taliban Tarana videos in order to become cognizant of ANSF and linguist personnel watching and listening to these resistance messages while on the FOBs, COPs, or patrol bases. Once Afghan personnel have been identified as listening to Taliban Taranas, then a dialogue should ensue between the identified Afghan, his leadership, and ISAF leadership to understand why the individual listens to the Taliban Taranas.

⁶ Translation of a Tarana posted on YouTube.

5. Related CALL publications:

- Inside the Wire Threat – Afghanistan, Green on Blue (FEB 2012)
- Linguist Inside the wire Threat, GTA 90-01-036 (MAR 2012)

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