

MILITARY-POLITICAL ACADEMIC COMPLEX

Robi Chakravorti

I am using the title of the article updating a concept US President Eisenhower used in his farewell address way back forty-five years ago. The linkage between military-industrial complex was emphasized in his address, but he, also, hinted at the potentiality of the operation of military-industrial complex in the political–academic area. Free and critical University, he noted in his address as “fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research....A governmental contract becomes virtually a substitute for institutional curiosity.”

Government funding to academic institutions has increased a great deal since. Many illustrations of this fact can be cited... CIA has funded directly or through academic institutions lots of money to influence intellectual activities such as research, publications or conventions. Sometimes funding can be done by America’s satellite states, too.

Way back in 1985 a scandal broke over a conference on Islamic fundamentalism held at Harvard University. The director of Harvard’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies who organized the conference admitted receiving a CIA grant of \$45,000 for the conference. Earlier, he had received over \$100,000 from CIA for working on a book on Saudi Arabia which was duly published by Harvard University Press.

A report published in *The New York Times* (Dec. 13,2005) revealed that Harvard University received donation of \$20 million from a Prince of the Royal family of Saudi Arabia aimed at financing Islamic studies. Saudi Arabia is ruled by a multi-billionaire, arch-conservative, large family monarchy controlling rich oil fields and Muslim holy places. It is the only country in the world named after a family dynasty. It is, also, economically and militarily supported by Washington. It can be called a US satellite ally in the Middle East. One wonders whether any criticism of the exploitation of Islamic tradition in modern condition by old-fashioned Saudi monarchy will be included in the Saudi-funded research.

These are cases of subtle linkage between political-monetary-academic complex. Let me present two cases of direct, open relationship of military-academic complex, one of the past, one recent.

An article published in the *Times* (London) recently (March 28,2006) was entitled, “How Oxford has taught America a new way to fight battles”. The article reports how an American military officer, Colonel Nagi who was Rhodes scholar at Oxford over a decade ago, now senior Pentagon adviser wrote a thesis on how the British Army succeeded in snuffing out the Malayan insurgency between 1948 and 1960. The book is reported to have impressed US Commander in Iraq. The writer of the thesis ,once interviewed, quoted an interesting comment by 19th century British soldier, Sir William Francis Butler, “A nation that draws a demarcation between its thinking men and fighting men will soon have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.” This is a colourful support for military-academic complex.

The *Footnotes Bulletin* (July-August, 2005) of the American Sociological Association which represents Sociology academics in the US published a report entitled : “Sociological Skills Used in the Capture of Saddam Hussein.”

An American military officer who wrote the piece combines official military experience with sociologist status as a Ph.D. student. The University of Maryland where he is a sociology student also has an institution called Center for Research on Military Organizations advocating sociological training for military officers. The name of the officer is Maj Brian Reed who was stationed in Iraq one year from March 2003 to March 2004. He claimed that a scholarly analysis of social network of the area where Saddam Hussein lived helped the tactics of his capture. According to his statement in the *Footnotes Bulletin*, “We constructed an elaborate product that traced the tribal and family linkages of Saddam Hussein thereby allowing us to focus on certain individuals who may have had (or presently had) close ties with him.”

Reed advocated the value of Military Sociology, arguing that the same way armed services develop new weapons and military technologies, sociologists in military are committed to exploring sophisticated ways of understanding social structures and cultures they are tasked to fight.

Military sociology courses are offered at West Point, Air Force Academy and the Naval Academy. The Center for Research on Military Operations received \$ 1.1/- million for research on “Social Structure, Social Systems and Social Networks.” According to University of Maryland’s military sociologist and director of the Center for Research on Military Organizations, international community of military sociologists numbers around 700. Two specialized journals on the subject also appear for support, of military sociology.

Political-academic complex can take a different form and may win support both from politicians and academics. In this context let me present a recent case presented in the *Footnotes Bulletin* (March 2006) of the American Sociological Association. Under the term Public Sociology a report appeared claiming support of Public Sociology helping US police controlling illegal immigration of cheap labor from Mexico.

A report by a Sociology Professor who worked with the US Border Patrol in one area claimed that he collected relevant data of the US Mexico border immigration problems and sent them to the US Congress. He was sympathetic to the plight of thousands of undocumented workers who were apprehended and several hundreds who died every year trying to enter the US as cheap labor.

One can describe this as a liberal form of political-academic complex. This is different from covert and overt connections between military-political-academic complex which can be described as “dirty work” with the help of “good people”. An American sociologist used these terms “Good People and Dirty Work” in an article in 1970.

Dirty relationship in military-political-academic complex has taken various forms. One classic example was the operation of the ‘Heritage Foundation’. According to a report in mid-eighties, Heritage Foundation was used as a conduit for transferring private contributions to Contra rebels in Central America. It formed an Asian Studies Center organising conservative, pro-US think-tanks in Southeast Asia.

There are many private organizations like Heritage Foundation that work in collusion with the Government's foreign service agencies. According to a report in the *New York Times* (Nov. 5, 2005) onetime CIA agent said: "Hide spies posing as cultural or economic attache's in embassy-based CIA status. CIA's secret training center runs a 6-month course to train spies for such positions... students, executives can act as CIA spies."

In many cases, this kind of linkage may cross the thin line between informal give-and-take and improper work like espionage and militant intervention. Occasional reports appear sometimes describing accounts of such activities. A book published in 1999 (*Who Paid The Piper? CIA and the cultural cold war*) presented many high-level institutions established during the cold war. Some of them are still active. A report presented in the book, *Professors, Politics and Pop* (1991) alleged that Yale University had links with CIA for decades.

As reports based on *The Mitrokhin Archive 11; The KGB and the World* (Penguin) published last year showed the Soviet Intelligence Agency, KGB also worked in the same style money-laundering operation in India during the height of the cold war. With the decline of Soviet power, CIA operates to a degree unmatched by any other country. America has one advantage for this kind of activity which other countries lack. As a nation of immigrants, it can use many "trojan horses" from the immigrant population for such operations.

During the cold war, America sponsored political-academic complex often operated in a subtle form alongside dirty crude type of linkage with military operation. Heritage Foundation's operation was presented as an illustration of this dirty type. Let me present a weird case of operation of CIA-academic linkage during the cold war. This was described as cultural propaganda developing 'liberal' approaches contrasting 'communist' ones.

During the hey days of Soviet power, vast resources for secret programmes for what can be called cultural propaganda specially in Europe were spent. These programmes were secretly funded and run by CIA. The major institution of this type of covert campaign was the Congress for Cultural Freedom. It had offices in many countries, published several prestigious magazines, organized international conferences, held art exhibitions and rewarded musicians and artists with prizes and public performances.

The Congress for Cultural Freedom's most famous product was *Encounter* magazine. It was a very sophisticated high-class magazine published upto 1970. Famous writers like W H Auden, Evelyn Waugh, Stephen Spender, Isaiah Berlin participated in the magazine. It published high-class material, indirectly influencing 'liberal' Western culture opposed to 'communist' one. It never published any critique of America. The sponsor of the magazine, the Congress for Cultural Freedom propagated so-called all freedoms, except freedom to criticize America. The agency sponsored similar-type publications in France, Germany and Italy. When the source of funding to the *Encounter* magazine was revealed, its co-editor Stephen Spender resigned. The American co-editor of the magazine, Irving Kristol, a Professor of New York University, when aware of the CIA funding openly supported it saying, "I think it is interesting that the only British magazine worth reading at the time was funded by the CIA and the British should be damn grateful." This is an example of sophisticated avenues of sponsoring support of ideological aspects of US policy in a selective manner.

So-called cultural cold war after the collapse of Soviet power has been converted into what some commentators describe as soft politics of cultural diplomacy. This type of approach may take a contemporary version of the performance of the *Encounter* magazine in the past, countering negative images of American conduct by propagating the cultural plus side based on a belief in America's global influence. During the cold war, this type of activity was aimed at influencing non-communist liberals, now its aim is to promote pro-US attitude through spread of various aspects of culture developed in America.

This type of cultural diplomacy sometimes may take crude forms as a report on the inclusion of a poem in a course book for 16-year students in Pakistan revealed. The book had a poem on the theme of leadership which included rhyming couplets describing George Bush as "solid as steel, strong in his faith." A BBC report on the subject noted that the poem may have been downloaded from the internet by a textbook writer and later approved for publication by the curriculum committee. After publication of this news, there were protests and the poem was reported to have been withdrawn from the textbook.

President Bush's recent action shows his support for the extensive operation of cultural diplomacy. He recently appointed a media strategist as under-secretary for "public diplomacy" at the State Department. An advisory committee for the purpose was made with distinguished academics and intellectuals. According to their argument, alongside all types of media aimed at foreign countries explaining and advancing political policies and cultural diplomacy which "reveals the soul of nation", American art, dance, film, jazz and literature inspire people the world over despite political differences. Cultural diplomacy, a member of the advisory committee said "demonstrates our values and our interest in values and combats the popular notion that Americans are shallow, violent and godless." (*The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 26, 2005) ❧❧❧❧