

US SOURCE CONTRADICTS CNN'S REPORTING IN ANONYMOUS LEAKS TO CNN

Yesterday, CNN released detailed onsite reporting from Yalda Hakim from the massacre site in Panjwai. (h/t SH) Today, CNN posted a follow-up interview—accompanied by a story based largely on comments from an anonymous US official. It's the latter story that Jim wrote about here, noting that:

- Robert Bales was assigned to guard duty the night of the attack
- The US has not had access to the sites of the massacre and therefore they have not been treated as a crime scene
- Bales was spotted by an Afghan guard leaving the first time around 1, and not seen on return; he reportedly spent 30 minutes on base and told his roommate he had been shooting Afghans; a second Afghan guard spotted him leaving so alerted the Americans; in response they started the search party to look for him; they found him returning at 3:30

- The US collected DNA samples from blood on Bales' clothing

Though CNN doesn't say it, some of the details contradict Hakim's onsite reporting, notably, her interview with several of the Afghan guards starting at 9:44 and again at 11:26. Between them, the guards offer the following story:

- One Afghan guard, Naimutallah (sp), said he saw Bales returning at 1:30 (and even cocked his gun in apparent alarm); he told the—presumably Afghan—duty officer, who “went to the interpreter to notify the foreign forces” of Bales' return
- Another Afghan guard said he saw Bales leave at 2:30; his “patrol” called the—presumably American—platoon commander to tell him an American had left

In other words, the Afghans say they at least tried to alert the Americans when Bales returned to the base, whereas today's story says no one alerted Americans of Bales' return the first time. The guards' story also suggests Bales was on base for a full hour. The American version claims not to know when Bales returned, but somehow is certain that Bales was only on base for 30 minutes. And if the second guard is correct that Bales left at 2:30, it means that it took a FOB an hour to mount a search team, at which point Bales had already killed another 12 victims.

Also note that General Karimi, who is conducting an investigation for Hamid Karzai, asks specifically why Bales' friend or roommate didn't notice him while he was on the base. That's prescient—or maybe he has reason to ask—given that CNN's anonymous source admits Bales did tell his roommate what he had been up to. (Also note that CNN's anonymous source dismisses that alcohol played a decisive factor, but doesn't say whether the two men drinking with Bales that night knew what he had been doing, or whether Bales drank with these men in the 30 minutes to an hour between his alleged attacks.)

Now, as Jim said, the Americans claim they haven't accessed the sites of the massacre. Compare that to the experience Hakim had. When she first tried to access the base, Afghan security forces told her the Taliban had mined the villages. She seemed skeptical of that claim. As it turns out, the next day, the same security forces were able to take her safely to the villages. In today's video, she describes the extent to which Karzai intervened to get her access to the survivors; I wonder whether he did the same to get her access to the villages. Update: I've watched Hakim's follow-up video again and she makes it clear that Karzai's intervention also got her access to the sites. When Hakim went to the villages, they were totally empty; the Afghans with her told her people had all left, to go to the cities.

Hakim's success at getting to the villages clearly suggests it would be possible to go there—though perhaps only with Karzai's approval, which makes me wonder whether Karzai is preventing Americans from accessing them (which may also prevent Americans from holding Bales fully responsible). Or maybe it's a real threat from the Taliban. Or maybe they have accessed the villages that an unarmed—albeit Pashto (presumably) speaking—woman managed to access, but claim they haven't.

One more fascinating detail revealed by the two

different CNN stories: In Hakim's reporting, one of the Afghan guards say that Americans stripped Bales to his underwear when bringing him back onto the base. Today, CNN's anonymous source reassures that they've got DNA taken from Bales' clothing. I'm not sure why, but that all seems rather suspicious.

I will do one more post on how Hakim's reporting adds details to the number and circumstances of the victims. But for now, I wanted to note that it sure seems like the military is trying to rebut or explain details revealed in Hakim's report.

One thing seems clear though. Every group involved with this: the villagers, some of whom may have ties to the Taliban, the Afghan security forces, Karzai, and the US, have dramatically conflicting motives here, which are made palpable in Hakim's reporting by the Afghans describing that the locals hate them because they hate the Americans and the widow saying she would rip Americans with her bare hands in retaliation.