

AFGHANISTAN CLAIMS ZAKARIA KANDAHARI ARRESTED SIX WEEKS AGO

The continuing saga of Zakaria Kandahari, who has been at the heart of the torture and murder cases that prompted Hamid Karzai to ban US Special Forces troops from the Nerkh District of Maidan Wardak Province took another huge twist Sunday, as Afghanistan confirmed that they have Kandahari in custody. An important point to keep in mind while reading the accounts of Kandahari and the US personnel he worked with is that a strong case can be made that Kandahari most likely was affiliated with the CIA, either directly as an agent or as a contractor. US denials of Kandahari working for Special Forces then become a ruse, since even if Special Forces were present with him, they likely would have been tasked to CIA for those particular missions, providing deniability for the entire group with respect to the missions being carried out by US Special Forces, ISAF or NATO.

From the New York Times story on Kandahari's arrest:

Afghan officials confirmed Sunday that they had arrested and were questioning Zakaria Kandahari, whom they have described as an Afghan-American interpreter responsible for torturing and killing civilians while working for an American Special Forces unit.

The arrest of Mr. Kandahari, who had been sought on charges of murder, torture and abuse of prisoners, was confirmed by Maj. Gen. Manan Farahi, the head of intelligence for the Afghan Defense Ministry. He said Mr. Kandahari, who escaped from an American base in January after President Hamid Karzai

demanded his arrest, had been captured in Kandahar by the National Directorate of Security, the Afghan intelligence service. There had been speculation for the last three weeks that Mr. Kandahari was in custody.

The Times leaves out a few important details when they mention Karzai's demand last January that Kandahari be arrested. Back in mid-May, they claimed it was the head of Afghanistan's military who demanded the arrest and provided details on John Allen making false promises that he would be turned over:

Afghan officials investigated the events in the Nerkh district, and when they concluded that the accusations of misconduct by the team were true, the head of the Afghan military, Gen. Sher Mohammad Karimi, personally asked the American commander at the time, Gen. John R. Allen, to hand Mr. Kandahari over to the Afghan authorities.

According to a senior Afghan official, General Allen personally promised General Karimi that the American military would do so within 24 hours, but the promise was not kept, nor was a second promise a day later to hand him over the following morning. "The next morning they said he had escaped from them and they did not know where he was," the official said.

Note that the Times said that there had been "speculation for the last three weeks" of Kandahari's arrest. The article on the arrest in the Washington Post states that he was arrested about six weeks ago:

Zakaria Kandahari was captured in a house in southern Kandahar during a raid by agents from the National Directorate of Security nearly six weeks ago and has

been transferred to Kabul for interrogations, officials said. Officials did not say why they waited to announce Kandahari's arrest.

Virtually every story I have read on Kandahari seems to include a denial by the US that he has US citizenship. Afghanistan continues to claim that he holds US citizenship. The Post article carries a claim that he holds dual citizenship:

The Kandahar governor's office described Kandahari as holding Afghan-American citizenship.

The timing of Kandahari being arrested six weeks ago is very interesting. That would place the arrest sometime in the final week of May. In the first week of June, we learned that an Afghan colonel had been arrested for turning over prisoners to the group led by Kandahari, so it seems likely this arrest came after Kandahari's.

There had been multiple public protests in reaction to the atrocities blamed on Kandahari, so keeping Kandahari's arrest secret for so long suggests that perhaps the Afghan government saw an opportunity to use him as a bargaining chip. What were they seeking that they could have seen as a higher priority than the obvious public accolades they would get for arresting such a hated figure? And was the attack on CIA headquarters in Kabul at all related to these events?

There is one further note on timelines here. From the New York Times story on Kandahari's arrest, we have this:

In addition, he said, the abuse of detainees continued even after Mr. Kandahari fled when Mr. Karzai demanded that he be handed over to the Afghan authorities. Four of those who were killed had been arrested after Mr. Kandahari fled, the authorities said.

The same article also notes that the disappearances took place "between November and February". Recall from above that John Allen was still in command in Afghanistan and was the one who made the false promises of turning over Kandahari (Allen handed over command to Dunford on February 10). Karzai's expulsion of US Special Forces from Wardak province (later narrowed to only the Nerkh District) was not announced until February 24, so it seems within the realm of possibility that Kandahari remained active with his interrogation group behind the scenes after his disappearance from public view but had to be removed from operations entirely once Karzai made his pronouncement. I had been convinced that the CIA had moved Kandahari to a location at which he never would be found, so his apparent capture only about three months after Karzai's expulsion of Special Forces comes as quite a surprise.