BODY OF ZAKARIA KANDAHARI'S VIDEOTAPED TORTURE VICTIM SURFACES, 200 YARDS FROM US NERKH BASE

When last we left the saga of the US role relating to the "rogue" Afghan death squad in the Nerkh District of Maidan Wardak province of Afghanistan, the New York Times was studiously transcribing denials from various US government officials of any US involvement in the torture, disappearances and murders that are both the touchstone of US-trained death squad operations dating back at least to Central America in the 1980's (if not all the way back to Vietnam) and the atrocities that prompted Hamid Karzai to announce that he was expelling US Special Forces from the province. Although Karzai eventually relented somewhat and agreed to only expel US Special Forces from the Nerkh District instead of the entire province, as I pointed out in my post on the Times' transcription of US denials, evidence continues to accumulate that CIA paramilitary operations personnel almost certainly seem to have been involved in the training and deployment of the "rogue" Afghan Local Police unit based in Nerkh. With today's new development, it seems very likely that these CIA paramilitary personnel (and their Afghan trainees) are still operating, with impunity, at the Nerkh base.

What we learn today is stunning and looks like a calculated move intended to strike fear into the local population around the Nerkh base (which is, of course, the aim of US-trained death squads organized under the COIN rubric). From the New York Times:

> Family members on Tuesday found the body

> of a man missing since last November near the American Special Forces base to which he was last seen being taken, according to Afghan officials and victims' representatives.
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> Afghan investigators said that after his disappearance, the man, Sayid Mohammad, was seen in a video undergoing torture at the hands of an Afghan-American named Zakaria Kandahari, who was the chief translator for an American Army Special Forces A Team stationed at the base in the Nerkh district of Wardak Province.
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> Mr. Mohammad's body was found about 200 yards outside the perimeter of the Nerkh base, which is now occupied by Afghan special forces after the American unit was removed following protests by Afghan officials, including President Hamid Karzai.
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> Relatives of Mr. Mohammad said his body was largely intact but both of his feet had been cut off. They took his remains to the Nerkh district government center in protest. The partial remains of another missing person were also found near the base, family members and Afghan officials have said.

The article is silent on the question of how long the victim appeared to have been dead. Note that the Times reminds us that the Nerkh base no longer has US Special Operations Forces. I find it very hard to believe that a group of Afghan Local Police and Afghan Special Forces, after having drawn so much local anger and international attention to themselves through prompting Karzai's outburst and expulsion of US Special Forces, would carry out such a brazen and brutal move on their own. However, if CIA paramilitary operatives are still present at the base and still directing (and protecting) the Afghan team, the move seems less surprising.

We also learn in today's article that at least 17 people are now known to have been disappeared by this death squad. Nine of those victims have been found dead and eight are still missing. Afghan investigators are considerably less credulous of US denials of involvement than the Times is:

> "There is no question that Zakaria directly tortured and murdered," the investigator said. "But who is Zakaria? Who recruited him, gave him his salary, his weapons? Who kept him under their protection? He worked for Special Forces. That a member of their team was committing such crimes and they didn't know it is just not credible."

The description of the videotape of the torture session conducted by Kandahari (which still has not been released) has changed in one respect. Today's article informs us that the Afghan investigator who was interviewed now says there were no voices with American accents on the tape.

Not that it really needs pointing out, but involvement of CIA paramilitary personnel at the Nerkh base would by definition be a covert mission covered by false, but official US government denials.

Oh, and there's one last question I would have added to the Afghan investigator's list above: Who helped Zakaria Kandahari to escape without a trace?

The answers to those questions would go a long way toward confirming or denying my speculation on CIA paramilitary personnel (including contractors) being central to these awful events.