

PROGRAM US HERALDS AS KEY TO AFGHAN STABILITY CONTINUES TO RELY ON GANG RAPES TO INTIMIDATE LOCALS

On Tuesday, I wrote about the disappearances, torture and murder for which the Afghan Local Police are known, comparing them to other death squad programs that the US has backed over the years in various military engagements. Sadly, there is another class of war crimes that US-trained death squads have engaged in. Rape, especially gang rape, also is a key tool employed by these groups in their efforts to intimidate local populations. (For one example, here are details of the brutal rape and murder of a group of US nuns in El Salvador in 1980, carried out by a US-trained death squad.)

Writing in the Daily Beast yesterday, Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau provided excruciating details on two victims of gang rapes carried out by groups in Afghan Local Police uniforms. From one of the accounts:

Seventeen-year-old Chaman Gul suffered a similar fate to that of Monizha. Relatives describe her as being a “healthy and attractive” young woman. In a phone interview with *Newsweek*/The Daily Beast, she described the ordeal she suffered two months ago in Aqsae village, Darzab district, in the northern province of Jowzjan. As she, her relatives and other villagers tell it, she was brutally raped by seven men, including the local militia’s powerful commander, Murad Bai. “They broke down the door of our home and did to me, a number of times, horrible things that I

can't tell anyone or put into plain words," she says from an undisclosed hiding place.

Other relatives and villagers confirm her account. One 60-year-old villager, who does not wish to be named for security reasons, says he watched as Bai and his men broke into Gul's house. He says they were wearing the khaki-colored uniforms of the ALP. "They came just after noon and collectively raped her," the villager says. "The village was so frightened no one could raise a voice against the ALP."

Adds a close relative, who also wishes to remain anonymous: "The girl was raped for hours and was in such a terrible condition that we thought she would die."

The family of Monizha, the victim of another attack described earlier in the article, chose to move to a refugee camp in Pakistan. In many respects, this is one of the ways that ALP "stabilize" villages in their vaunted Village Stability Operations: they strike so much fear into the local population that they remain silent or even leave the area. But the Gul family reacted differently:

Rather than quietly hiding her suffering, as most victims and their families do, Gul took her case to the district and provincial authorities—but to no avail. "I complained to everyone in the concerned departments, but no one heard my voice," she says.

The Darzab district police chief even threw her father out of his office. "The district police chief never offered any help or sympathy," she says. "Another senior policeman told us the commander (Murad Bai) is the darling of the Americans and no one can touch him."

And that is the key to how these atrocities are carried out. The heads of the militias, whether they are officially within the Afghan Local Police, or supposedly unsanctioned, but wearing ALP uniforms (and I suspect in that case, these groups are more likely to be CIA-affiliated "A-teams" like the one headed by Zakarai Kandahari in my post from Tuesday), are working with the blessings of, and under the protection of, the US. The groups know that they will not be held accountable for anything they do and this unlimited power can lead to the atrocities that we have seen.

The US can not claim ignorance of these types of atrocities. In December of 2011, Human Rights Watch begged the US not to expand the Afghan Local Police program:

President Barack Obama should halt plans by the US military to expand the Afghan Local Police program until significant reforms are made in training, supervision, and accountability, Human Rights Watch said today. On December 10, 2011, the commander of US Special Operations Command, Adm. William McRaven, suggested in a media briefing that the Afghan Local Police (ALP), locally based paramilitary units, would be increased from its current strength of 9,800 to more than 30,000.

A September 2011 Human Rights Watch report, "Just Don't Call it a Militia: Impunity, Militias, and the 'Afghan Local Police,'" detailed abuses by the ALP and various militias created or supported by the US since the defeat of Taliban rule in 2001. The report, while acknowledging that ALP units had contributed recently to improved security in some areas, documented serious abuses by ALP and other US-backed forces in several provinces, including looting, illegal detention, beatings, killings, sexual assault, and

extortion. The report also described how the establishment of the ALP had inflamed ethnic tensions in some areas.

“The Afghan Local Police needs to be fixed before it can be expanded,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Instead of rushing to triple the size of the Afghan Local Police, the US and Afghan governments should be adopting mechanisms to ensure these forces abide by the law.”

In his written response to questions submitted in advance of his confirmation hearing last November, the US Commander in Afghanistan, Joseph Dunford, had this to say (pdf) about the ALP program:

Afghan Local Police/Village Stability Operations

The Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police (ALP) programs have been called critical to ISAF’s counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan.

What has been the effect of these programs on rural Afghan populations and what has been the response from the Taliban?

Successful counterinsurgencies require the involvement of local, indigenous defense forces. The program utilizes US and Coalition SOF to train Afghans in rural areas to defend their communities against threats from insurgents and militant groups. The ALP program continues to expand and gain popular support with Afghans. Both VSO and ALP have made substantial progress in protecting and mobilizing rural populations, preventing their exploitation by the insurgency, and expanding the influence of the Afghan government. The United Nations

Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released its annual report on the protection of civilians, which noted that ALP had improved security and kept insurgents out of ALP areas.

Underscoring the effectiveness of the program, the Taliban increasingly and specifically targeted ALP for direct attacks and infiltration to weaken the program. To mitigate the risk of insider threats, SOJTF-A has taken active measures to re-validate all of the more than 17,000 ALP.

From Dunford's comments here, one would presume that the only issue the ALP program has faced has been insider killings. Dunford outlines how he thinks that re-validating security screening will eliminate that threat. The pleas from Human Rights Watch and others to reform the ALP program back in 2011 appear to have been ignored. The US whitewashing of the atrocities in Maidan Wardak, and especially the "disappearance" of Zakaria Kandahari shows that the US will brook no discussion of flaws in its vaunted Village Stability Operations. The documentation of ongoing gang rapes with impunity also confirms that the US has no plans to rein these groups in any time in the near future.