

NYTIMES CAREFULLY TRANSCRIBES DUBIOUS DENIALS OF US ROLE IN WARDAK PROVINCE TORTURE, MURDERS

As evidence from investigations carried out by Afghan officials continues to mount that a figure now named (although it seems quite likely to me that this is not a real name) Zakaria Kandahari is at the heart of the cases of torture and murder of Afghan civilians that prompted Hamid Karzai to ban US Special Forces from Maidan Wardak province in February, the US found it necessary to provide an anonymous official to the New York Times as they published the Afghan revelations. Here is the heart of the dispute as outlined in the Times article:

The accusations against the man, Zakaria Kandahari, and the assertion that he and much of his unit are American are a new turn in a dispute over counterinsurgency tactics in Wardak that has strained relations between Kabul and Washington. American officials say their forces are being wrongly blamed for atrocities carried out by a rogue Afghan unit. But the Afghan officials say they have substantial evidence of American involvement.

They say they have testimony and documents implicating Mr. Kandahari and his unit in the killings or disappearances of 15 Afghans in Wardak. Mr. Kandahari is of Afghan descent but was born and raised in the United States, they say. Included in the evidence, the Afghan officials say, is a videotape of Mr. Kandahari torturing one of the 15 Afghans, a man they identified as Sayid Mohammad.

As the discussion moves to the videotape, the anonymous official is trotted out:

Afghan officials who have seen the videotape say a person speaking English with an American accent can be heard supervising the torture session, which Mr. Kandahari is seen conducting.

An American official, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with official policy, confirmed the existence of the video showing Mr. Kandahari but denied that he was an American citizen. "Everybody in that video is Afghan; there are no American voices," the official said.

What appears not to be in dispute, then, is that Kandahari is torturing the victim in the tape. The US claims no Americans are present and even that the voice identified by the Afghans as having an American accent is not American. But how can the anonymous US official know whose voice is the one in dispute? If the person is not seen on the tape, then the only way the American official's claim could be true is if they carried out voice analysis on a computer and got a positive match with a person known not to be American.

But the next denial from the anonymous official is even less believable. The US Special Forces group at the center of this controversy is now known to have been based in the Nerkh district of the province and to be an "A Team", "who work with extra resources that the military calls "enablers"". Remarkably, the article doesn't make the tiny leap that is needed to deduce that at least some of these "enablers" working with the A Team must be CIA, even though near the end of the article, it is noted that this group came to Nerkh from Camp Gecko in Kandahar and there is a definite CIA connection there:

Afghan officials and human rights investigators say Camp Gecko, formerly

the home of the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, now includes a C.I.A. paramilitary base and some Special Operations facilities.

The almost certain involvement of CIA personnel or contractors with the A Team makes this denial from the anonymous official laughable:

The American official said the team was not to blame. "We have done three investigations down there, and all absolve ISAF forces and Special Forces of all wrongdoing," the official said, referring to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. "It is simply not true."

Of course, Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan have been known to commit atrocities and then try to stand by their lies of not carrying them out. At least once, they have even been caught digging bullets out of innocent victims to try to hide their involvement. In this case, however, the amorphous Kandahari character seems to fit as a CIA operative, so a denial by Special Operations is most likely only a diversion.

More evidence that Kandahari most likely is CIA comes from his "mysterious" disappearance:

The American official said the military was not trying to shield Mr. Kandahari. "The S.F. guys tried to pick him up, but he got wind of it and went on the lam, and we lost contact with him," the official said. "We would have no reason to try to harbor this individual."

But it turns out that Kandahari isn't the only one who disappeared. If we go back to the Washington Post article on Karzai expelling Special Operations forces, we have this:

In earlier interviews, palace officials

said they submitted a report to Karzai on Jan. 7 about one round of investigation of the alleged misconduct. The inquiry found that up to eight Afghan translators for American troops were operating in the northern Nerkh district of Wardak, wearing the uniforms of Afghan commandos in the national army. People had complained about abusive treatment by the group, the report said.

The Afghan defense minister, Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, said at the time that the ministry demanded that NATO hand over the men. But coalition officials reportedly said they were not working with the alliance and had disappeared.

Interestingly, the story now in the New York Times is that those uniforms worn by the now-disappeared group were “American-style”. And they were a colorful group indeed:

Afghan officials give a different account of his role. They say he and others working with the team wore American-style military uniforms, but had long beards and often, bizarrely, rode motorized four-wheeled bikes on hunts for insurgents. The Afghan officials said Mr. Kandahari appeared to be in a leadership position in the unit.

If they weren’t CIA, how else could a group of eight “translators” wearing either US or Afghan uniforms, but sporting long beards (which would stand out since both US and Afghan forces generally are clean shaven when in uniform) just disappear into the Afghan sunset on four wheelers? The one bit of truth I find in this part of the account is where the anonymous US official states that Kandahari “got wind” of the intent to hand him over to the Afghans. Of course the CIA enablers working with the A Team would have no difficulty in getting wind that

they need to hit the road.