

KARZAI OBJECTS TO SHAM AGREEMENT ON AIR STRIKE “RESTRICTIONS”

Hamid Karzai lashed out yesterday against the continued use of NATO air strikes in civilian areas. He angrily referred to police actions in the US and France, noting that even when the most dangerous suspects are being sought, houses where they are holed up are never bombed. Remarkably, the New York Times provided background that helps to understand Karzai's rage, explaining that the sham agreements on night raids and prison management recently enacted only “nominally” put Afghanistan in charge.

Here's a basic description of the new “restrictions” on air strikes as it appears in the Washington Post:

Allen issued new orders this week restricting the use of airstrikes on civilian dwellings in response to the Logar deaths and continued criticism by Karzai. U.S. military officials said commanders will be instructed to use other means to get Taliban fighters out of homes and buildings rather than calling in airstrikes. Civilian homes have been damaged by airstrikes 32 times so far this year, according to U.S. military statistics.

Ah, but as in all the NATO agreements driven by the Obama administration, the devil is in the details. As the New York Times reported on the US response to Karzai's outburst:

Hours later, the allied commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John R. Allen, reiterated significant changes to rules concerning the use of airstrikes

announced earlier this week, issuing a statement in which he said he had given the order that “no aerial munitions be delivered against civilian dwellings.” But he added the caveat that the strikes would be permitted as an absolute last resort in self-defense “if no other options are available.”

As in all other agreements from Obama and NATO, the caveat allows a full work-around of the main point of the agreement. Here is how the article describes the night raid and prison management agreements in the context of the air raid “restrictions”:

But authority over both night raids and detention is nominally in the hands of Afghans now, since memorandums of understanding were signed this spring. And, while Americans still call many of the shots on both, the clock is running on how long that will go on: the NATO combat mission in Afghanistan is set to end in 2014, and by the end of this year, there will be 23,000 fewer American troops here.

So Afghanistan is in charge of night raids. But not really. And Afghanistan is in charge of prisons. But not really. And NATO will not bomb civilian areas. But not really. Is it any wonder that Karzai is ranting? Returning to the Washington Post article:

Karzai said he had an argument with Gen. John Allen, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, over the weekend about the issue, following a deadly airstrike that killed civilians in Logar province. “I said, ‘Do you do this in the United States?’ There is police action every day in the United States in various localities. They don’t call an airplane to bomb the place.”

The Times carries more of this outburst, where Karzai expanded it to include more of NATO:

“There was a police action in France, in Toulouse, when they were going to neutralize the terrorist,” Mr. Karzai said, referring to a French siege in March at an apartment where a man had holed up after killing seven people. “They were engaged in a fight with the person who was in a house, for about 36 hours or so, but they didn’t call the French Air Force to bomb the house.”

Mr. Karzai added: “Airstrikes are not used in civilian areas. If they don’t want to do it in their own country, why do they do it in Afghanistan?”

Don’t worry, Hamid, NATO and the US have promised they will only bomb civilians as a “last resort”. Don’t you trust them?