

THE US AND AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY BECOME PARTNERS ON NIGHT RAIDS

Yesterday, the US and Afghanistan drew closer to an agreement on night raids. Not only would the deal give Afghan courts veto power over the raids (though, in some cases, the raids could be approved after the fact), but it makes Afghan military personnel the lead in any night raids.

Under terms of the proposed accord, night operations by special forces would be subject to review by Afghan judges. The deal, which people familiar with it said could be signed later this week, would also give Afghan forces the lead in all the operations.

Also yesterday, General Sher Mohammad Karimi, who is not only the lead investigator into the Panjwai massacre, but is also the Afghan army chief and a graduate of several Special Forces courses at Fort Bragg, announced that he had spoken with two witnesses who said just one soldier came to their house on March 11.

Afghan army chief Gen. Sher Mohammad Karimi, whom Karzai sent to Kandahar to investigate the massacre, told McClatchy that two survivors he interviewed offered credible accounts that the killings were the act of a lone person.

"They told me the same thing," Karimi said. "They both said there was (only) one individual who came to their house."

Now, there are more than two witnesses to the killings. Though there are more surviving witnesses from Alkozai than there are from Najiban, where all the people in Mohmmaed

Wazir's home were killed, and where Mohammad Dawood's children have said just one individual "came to their house" but more were standing outside with lights on. It would be fairly easy to find two witnesses from Alkozai to say there was just one killer—as most evidence suggests there was—but harder to find two **adult** witnesses to say much of anything about what occurred at Najiban (though Dawood's wife and Agha Lala appear to agree there were multiple men **at the village**), which is where evidence suggested there was more than one killer but which is also where almost all the adult witnesses are now dead.

Add in the fact that Karimi explicitly states that he hopes there is just one killer.

Karimi said a joint Afghan-U.S. team was continuing to investigate the killings and hoped to collect more forensic evidence.

"I hope it is proved that it is one guy," he said.

And that Karimi hasn't been permitted to speak with Sergeant Bales, and this statement should be taken at face value.

The guy who just got put in charge of American Special Forces running night raids in Afghanistan (the same ones who might be implicated if more than one person was present at Panjwai) has stated he found two witnesses who say only one man came in their house the night of the killing.

There's one more detail that's interesting about yesterday's developments. According to the WSJ, there's still a dispute about what happens to those Afghans captured on night raids.

Officials had expected the deal could be signed as soon as Wednesday. But a last-minute disagreement arose over how long U.S. forces would be allowed to hold Afghan detainees picked up in joint

Afghan-American special-operations night raids. The U.S. wants to be able to question detainees to try to glean intelligence about militant networks and activities. The Afghans want control of the detainees.

On Monday, with some fanfare, the US congratulated the guy who is now purportedly in charge of Afghan Detention Operation Command.

Top U.S. military and diplomatic officials in Afghanistan offered their congratulations yesterday as an Afghan officer took charge of Afghan Detention Operations Command.

Marine Corps Gen. John R. Allen, commander of the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, joined U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan C. Crocker in congratulating Maj. Gen. Farooq Barezai on his assumption of command at a ceremony held in Parwan, Afghanistan.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai appointed Barezai to his new position March 28, officials said.

"Today's event is nothing short of monumental when looking at the significance of Major General Barezai's assumption of command and the responsibilities he assumes for the Afghan people and his nation's justice system," Allen said at the ceremony. "This is a symbolic and visible step marking the progress we continue to make in partnership with the Afghan government as we work to develop and uphold the sovereignty they rightfully deserve."

Officials said the ceremony marked the first step of an agreed-upon process that will give the Afghan defense ministry full control of the detention

facility within six months while protecting U.S. international and domestic legal obligations regarding detainees. Under the terms of a memorandum of understanding signed March 9, **the United States will provide ongoing support and advice to the Afghan commander for up to one year.**

“This assumption of command marks another step in the transition to Afghan control of security and is a sign of our support for Afghan sovereignty, as well as our commitment to an enduring partnership,” Crocker said. [my emphasis]

Yeah, there’s that bit about us hanging around for a year as “advisors.” But if this truly is “nothing short of monumental” (man is General Allen one superlative ass-kisser), then why, two days later, did we say we don’t actually want to hand over detainees?

And if General Barekzai is in charge of the detention system we don’t want to hand over detainees into, then where do we intend to question these detainees? FOBs?

In short, there’s a whole lot of kabuki going on, at least with regards to the “sovereignty” we’re devolving to Afghans, and possibly with respect to the Panjwai massacre.