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US Still Supporting Abusive Afghan Militias as Civil War Looms

Posted By John Glaser

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The US is clinging to a controversial policy of training local Afghan militias to carry on the task of keeping order beyond the 2014 date for withdrawal of foreign troops. But the armed gangs are not winning hearts and minds and US support [may be laying the groundwork for civil war](#) in Afghanistan.

The strategy is the brain-child of David Petraeus, who employed a similar approach in Iraq with the so-called Sunni Awakening which mobilized local militias against al-Qaeda.

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) was created in July 2010, and the aim is to reach about 30,000 fighters before withdrawal. In March 2011, Petraeus told the Senate that the ALP is “arguably the most critical element in our effort to help Afghanistan develop the capacity to secure itself.”

But the ALP have been using U.S. support to [assert their authority and commit severe crimes against Afghan civilians](#). A Human Rights Watch [report](#) from last September “documents serious abuses, such as killings, rape, arbitrary detention, abductions, forcible land grabs, and illegal raids by irregular armed groups in northern Kunduz province and the Afghan Local Police (ALP).”

The ALP has been accused of “beating teenage boys and hammering nails into the feet of one boy,” although no arrests were made. “In April,” the report documents, “four armed ALP members in Baghlan abducted a 13-year-old boy on his way home from the bazaar and took him to the house of an ALP sub-commander, where he was gang raped.” The perpetrators are well known, but no arrests have been made.

The ALP has raided several houses, stolen personal belongings, beat residents, and illegally detained a number of Afghans. Like in the other cases though, no arrests or investigations have been initiated because of the militias’ patronage links to senior Afghan officials.

As is evident in the aftermath of NATO intervention in Libya, militias don’t really go away. And now many of the fighters are grouping into factions and ruling over various clumps of Afghan territory.

“Mark my words, the moment the Americans leave, the civil war will begin,” Abdul Nasir, an Afghan, recently [told the *New Yorker*](#). “This country will be divided into twenty-five or thirty fiefdoms, each with its own government.”

The fact that Obama uses taxpayer money to fund, arm, and train militias widely accused of human rights abuses is bad enough. But the policy is also sowing the seeds of further chaos once the US finally decides to leave.