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US Special Forces likely to remain in Wardak province

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Afghan and U.S. officials are working on a compromise deal to allow American special forces to stay in a strategically key province near the capital in return for full Afghan control of a controversial jail, Reuters reported.

A top Afghan official quoted by Reuters said “There might be a compromise on Wardak when the Afghan side is given full control of Bagram prison, which would help President Karzai who views the issue as a matter of sovereignty.”

The US special forces are still operating in Wardak province of Afghanistan who were due to leave the province about a week ago following president Hamid Karzai’s decree to expel US special forces.

Karzai’s decree had angered U.S. defense officials who worry their exit could allow insurgents to strengthen their presence the area and use it as a base to attack Kabul, only 25 km (15 miles) away.

On Saturday, the influential Ulema Council, whose members are appointed by President Karzai and represent all of the country’s Islamic clerics, issued a threatening statement demanding the withdrawal from Wardak as well as a transfer of the American-controlled prison at Bagram to Afghan control.

Also on Saturday, 300 demonstrators from Wardak Province staged a noisy but peaceful demonstration calling for Mr. Karzai's order to be obeyed. Some were apparently relatives of people who disappeared in raids by Afghans who work alongside the Americans in Wardak, and they carried photographs of nine people who had disappeared after one of the night operations.