

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

The Huffington Post

Outsourcing the Dirty War in Afghanistan

By Erica Gaston

09/30/2010

A big revelation from Bob Woodward's new book "Obama's Wars" is that the CIA maintains a 3000-strong Afghan paramilitary force that conducts cross-border operations into Pakistan. Though news to the U.S. public, these abusive paramilitary forces are unfortunately far too well known to many Afghan civilians.

As a human rights researcher in Afghanistan for the last two years, I have found that some of the worst behavior toward civilians comes from these CIA paramilitary forces. Civilians described how these groups, often called "campaign forces", used disproportionate and indiscriminate force, throwing grenades or firing into homes without provocation during night-time house raids. Those who were detained by these paramilitary forces described being beaten, gun-butted, or otherwise abused.

Many civilians believe that assassinations and targeted killings that are publicly blamed on NATO forces or insurgents are actually carried out by these paramilitary forces. In the most publicized incident to date, these paramilitary forces attacked the police headquarters in Kandahar city, killing the chief of police.

Former detainees frequently report semi-permanent detention facilities at the campaign force bases. Given the secrecy surrounding these forces, verifying any of these claims is nearly impossible. Although significant reforms have been made to improve the

transparency of U.S. detention practices, the detention practices of these rogue forces, like the rest of their conduct, is a black hole.

Communities are terrified of these forces, given their fierce reputation and the lack of any consequences for their actions. I spoke with a community elder who said he approached campaign forces about the whereabouts of a community member who was detained by them in a night raid. In response, the forces threatened that he or the man detained would be killed or taken away to Guantanamo Bay "forever." Similar threats were made to others who made requests for information following campaign force detentions.

Though confirmation that the CIA supports these groups is news to the American public, Afghans have long known about these forces and associated them with the U.S. The fact that forces employed by the U.S. are allowed to behave this way without repercussion exacerbates Afghan mistrust of U.S. intentions.

Woodward's book does not describe the lines of authority, if any, over these forces. One of the few snapshots on how the Obama Administration views these forces is a spring 2010 conversation in which proponents of a more limited, troop-lite, counterterrorism strategy noted with satisfaction that these paramilitary forces were able to continue to hunt insurgents even in areas with little U.S. troop support. At least based on Woodward's account, there appears to be little discussion over whether these forces might be harming the broader civilian population, a cause for concern on both a moral and a strategic level.

Counterinsurgency is premised on denying insurgent forces local support by addressing the grievances. Two key grievances that have turned Afghans toward the Taliban are civilian casualties caused by international forces and abuses of power by the Afghan government. US-supported paramilitary death squads who kill and abuse civilians with impunity gives the Taliban a potent propaganda tool, and makes it difficult to instill in Afghan officials the importance of accountability.

Woodward describes the shock and, often, disgust, of incoming Obama officials upon learning about past U.S. rendition practices, rough interrogation methods, and other tools of the War on Terror. Significant efforts have been made to restrict such practices, to reduce civilian harm in Afghanistan, and to improve detention practices. Given those reforms, it should be unacceptable for a branch of the U.S. government to hire armed thugs in Afghanistan to kill, threaten, torture, and abuse Afghan and Pakistani citizens under the barely plausible deniability of U.S. authority.

Many mistakes were made in the name of security shortly after September 11, from rendition of terror suspects to horrific treatment at Abu Ghraib. But as these practices became known, the American public said no to U.S. involvement in this type of gloves-off behavior. Outsourcing abuse to unaccountable Afghan militias is no different. The U.S. must hold all forces under its watch in Afghanistan to the same moral standard: to establish stability and peace and protect civilians, not terrorize them.