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US-Supported Afghan Militias to Expand, Despite Atrocities

By John Glaser

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The U.S. policy of arming and supporting violent, criminal Afghan militias to fight Taliban insurgents in villages across Afghanistan [is in the process of being expanded, according to a senior officer in NATO-led war](#).

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) was created in July 2010, intended to supplement the Afghan national army at the community and village level in the lead up to the drawdown of U.S. occupation forces. In March 2011, General Petraeus told the U.S. 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 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 governments of the United States and of Afghanistan have not only failed to hold these forces to account, but they have fostered future abuses and generated more support for the Taliban and the insurgency, the report found.

And now, the U.S. mission is to expand the ALP strategy. “The scheme is likely to be expanded and extended,” a senior officer from the coalition told Reuters. “It’s under discussion but in some areas it is a really critical part of security.” There are currently about 10,000 ALP in force, while the original plan aimed at 30,000.

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.

That the Obama administration views avid support for human rights abuses as “a critical part of security” in Afghanistan reveals the twisted, face-saving nature of the war. The strategy seems to suggest that a victory will come when U.S. supported groups terrorize Afghanistan, without interference from the Taliban.