

CUTS TO CIA MILITIAS IN AFGHANISTAN TINY FRACTION OF FORCE AVAILABLE TO THEM

Somehow I had missed Kimberly Dozier's recent move from AP to The Daily Beast. In an article that she published last night, it appears that she is trying to move in on Eli Lake's territory there as chief CIA mouthpiece. From the breathless opening, it appears that we are to wring our hands over the CIA being forced to dismantle key forces in its counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan:

The CIA is dismantling its frontline Afghan counterterrorist forces in south and east Afghanistan leaving a security vacuum that U.S. commanders fear the Taliban and al-Qaeda will fill—and leaving the Pakistan border open to a possible deluge of fighters and weapons.

“The CIA has started to end the contracts of some of those militias who were working for them,” said Aimal Faizi, spokesman for outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a longtime critic of the CIA's Afghan operatives. “Some of them were in very important locations, so we deployed our troops there.”

U.S. and Afghan military commanders tell The Daily Beast that Afghan forces are stretched too thin to replace many of those departing CIA paramilitaries. Thousands more CIA-trained operatives are about to get the boot ahead of what already promises to be a bloody summer fighting season. That could mean spectacular attacks against U.S. and Afghan targets just as the White House is weighing its long-term commitment to

Afghanistan. And it could give the now-small al-Qaeda movement inside the country more freedom to grow and eventually hatch new plots more than a decade after the invasion meant to wipe out the perpetrators of the Sept. 11th attacks.

Note this very interesting Twitter conversation between Arif Rafiq and Blake Hounshell regarding the purpose of this article as most likely the CIA leaking the information in order to get some of the changes reversed. But there is another aspect to this story that needs to be considered. As we get further into the story, we get details on the numbers involved:

The forces now facing the chopping block are 750 members of the Counterterrorist Pursuit Teams in the Kunar region – home to the elusive Afghan al-Qaeda leader Farouq al-Qahtani al-Qatari – and the entire 3,500-strong Khost Protection Force.

Completely missing from the article is any mention of another network of small militias that also operate within Afghanistan with CIA and/or JSOC handlers “advising” them: the Afghan Local Police. I had already noted over a year ago that with the impending pullout of US troops, control of these death squads would transition exclusively to the CIA (note Dozier’s statement that the CIA is not affected by the Bilateral Security Agreement—meaning that they have no intention of leaving even if the military is forced into the “zero option”), even as they are forced to withdraw to fewer bases.

If we look at the latest quarterly report (pdf) from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, we see that the ALP now sits at a force size of 26,647 with all but a little fewer than 900 of them fully trained. That is still a very formidable number of operatives for the CIA to control, and as seen

in this post from about a year ago, they have good distribution across the country. These are ruthless forces that are not well-regarded by local residents, as we see in SIGAR's report:

This quarter, the Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) released the findings of a focus group survey to gauge the public's perception of the ALP. During the survey, 28 focus groups consisting of six to ten community members and village elders were asked a series of questions about the ALP. While focus groups in the northern and southern districts had the most negative perception of the ALP, all focus groups agreed that the ALP improves community security. The ALP received mixed marks for fighting local crime and were criticized for participating in community dispute resolution in several districts. According to SOJTF-A, several participants noted that since the ALP came under control of the ANP, they have turned to corruption and criminality to offset salaries that are not always paid on time.

The focus group survey identified both strengths and weaknesses in the ALP. Among the ALP's strengths are ALP members' local knowledge, their constant presence in villages, and opportunities they provide local youth through recruitment. Weaknesses included insufficient training and a lack of adequate equipment as well as "the predatory practices of some ALP members on neighboring communities that lack their own ALP units." Respondents also noted factionalism and tribal discrimination in the ALP recruitment process.

It's hard to see how the loss of about 4000 militia members will be a huge blow to an

operation where CIA handlers still have access to over 26,000 well-armed ruthless fighters who don't mind terrorizing the local population when their salary payments are delayed. And in fact, virtually all of those affected by the current "cuts" will be canceled out by the fact that the goal for ALP is a force size of 30,000 by the end of this year.

SIGAR informs us that sustaining this force will cost the US over \$120 million a year.

There is one more very important point in the SIGAR report. It turns out that we have equipped the ALP with 23,246 AK-47's. So that means that the 2 million rounds of AK-47 ammunition in Charlie Strong's revelation about the Camp Stanley "Midwest Depot" facility from which the CIA disperses weapons can be accounted for with fewer than a hundred rounds for each AK-47 in ALP possession.

Look for the CIA to be the main force behind the ALP going into the future, whether or not a Bilateral Security Agreement is eventually put into place allowing a few thousand US troops to remain in the country. The Afghan National Army (and especially its Special Forces operatives) is officially controlling the ALP now, but as SIGAR informs us, their support is not very enthusiastic:

According to the CNA independent assessment released this quarter, CNA "interviewees in theater told us that the Chief of the ANA General Staff does not want [ANA Special Forces] to be formally associated with the ALP program, in part due to the ALP's past record of human rights abuses." CNA noted that "it does not appear that the government of Afghanistan intends for the [ANA Special Forces] to continuing raising ALP after 2014."

That "past record of human rights abuses" seems just the ticket for a CIA death squad, however,

so look for these groups to “mysteriously” stay intact once their support moves over to the black budget.