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American Accused of Torturing, Disappearing Afghan Civilians

By Jason Ditz

May 12, 2013

Two months after the initial Afghan government demands for the US to withdraw its forces from Wardak Province, the troops are still there, and the government is still unhappy about it. But new details may mean an additional push after their first effort failed to convince the US to go.



Afghan officials now say that they have a specific suspect, an Afghan-born American citizen named Zakaria Kandahari, who they have implicated in at least 15 different killings or disappearances, and who they have on video torturing a detainee.

Kandahari appears to have been affiliated with the Special Forces in Nerkh District, which were the source of a lot of complaints. Among the 15 he is accused of killing is Mohammad Qassim, whose body was found in a trash pit just outside the base after being detained.

US officials confirmed the existence of the video tape showing Kandahari, but denied that he was an American citizen, insisting “everyone in that video is Afghan.” Afghan officials say Kandahari was speaking English in the video, and an unseen supervisor is also heard speaking English in an American accent.

Kandahari’s putative Special Forces Team A group was said to move in and out of the base with impunity, and Afghan officials say the group regularly wore US military uniforms, with long beards, and rode around on motorized four-wheel bikes hunting for “insurgents.” The group regularly detained people, accusing them of working with either the Taliban or the Hezb-i Islami.

Afghan officials claim Gen. Allen, the top US commander, promised to hand over Kandahari to Afghan officials. The US insisted they tried but he got away, then later claimed Allen never had any conversations about Kandahari at all.