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As U.S. Admits Killing and Covering Up Pregnant Afghan Women's Murder, Karzai Goes Rogue

By Liliana Segura

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The most recent news from Afghanistan shows how deadly and dysfunctional the U.S. mission there is.

"If you and the international community pressure me more, I swear that I am going to join the Taliban."

So Afghan President Hamid Karzai reportedly told a member of the Afghan parliament on Saturday, signaling a new low in his relationship with the U.S. and NATO. Karzai's weekend remarks are only the latest example of "anti-Western" sentiment reported in recent weeks; "The remarks are genuinely troubling," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters on Monday.

Karzai's "going rogue" is but one example of the latest bad news out of Afghanistan at the start of a week that has already seen heinous revelations of civilian deaths, military cover-ups, and ongoing PR spin by the Pentagon and the Obama administration, even as its relationship with the Afghan government deteriorates.

Karzai's comment came a week after he publicly accused the U.S. and its allies of election fraud last summer (part of a broader attempt to cripple him and the Afghan government), not to

mention a brief, unannounced trip by President Obama to Kabul last weekend, during which he urged Karzai to stamp out the corruption that undermines the legitimacy of the Afghan government." There is no doubt that the fraud was very widespread, but this fraud was not committed by Afghans, it was committed by foreigners," Karzai said last Thursday in a televised speech.

"They want parliament to be weakened and battered and for me to be an ineffective president, and for parliament to be ineffective."

Karzai's latest remarks appear to also be an attempt to cast himself as a leader willing to stand up to Western occupiers, rather than a U.S.-backed figurehead brought into power at the hands of said occupiers.

"In this situation there is a thin curtain between invasion and co-operation assistance," Karzai said, adding that the Taliban "could become a national resistance."

Karzai's political rival, Abdullah Abdullah, who he defeated in last year's elections, called his comments "extraordinary" -- "this is treason to the national interest" -- going so far as to suggest that Karzai is mentally unstable. "As a former colleague and doctor, I think this is beyond a normal attitude," Abdullah said.

According to the Washington Post, "despite a conciliatory call to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday, Karzai again distanced himself from his Western backers" on Sunday, "by telling tribal elders Afghans need to see their leaders are not 'puppets' and that government officials should not let 'foreigners' meddle in their work."

Ramped up tensions between Karzai and the Obama administration come at the same time as the U.S. military has finally admitted what reports in the UK press -- and precious few U.S. outlets -- revealed weeks ago: a botched raid involving U.S. Special Forces in February left three Afghan women dead, two of whom were pregnant.

"After initially denying involvement or any cover-up in the deaths of three Afghan women during a badly bungled American Special Operations assault in February, the American-led military command in Kabul admitted late on Sunday that its forces had, in fact, killed the women during the nighttime raid," the New York Times reported Monday.

According to officials, Afghan-led investigators discovered grisly signs of an attempted cover up, including seven out of some 11 bullets fired in the raid, reportedly retrieved from the bodies of the victims. According to the Times of London, which was the first to report the women's deaths, "U.S. special forces soldiers dug bullets out of their victims' bodies in the bloody aftermath ... then washed the wounds with alcohol before lying to their superiors about what happened."

The Times's source is an unnamed senior Afghan official involved in the investigation. "The bodies showed there were big holes," he told the paper. Also according to the Times, "video footage of the raid's aftermath, collected by Afghan investigators, shows close-up shots of one

man's bloodstained and punctured torso and walls with blood on them. The Afghan official's conclusion that the bullets were removed is based on the testimony of survivors, analysis of the photographs and the missing bullets."

In the investigator's opinion, General Stanley McChrystal did not know about the cover-up -- "I think the special forces lied to McChrystal" -- but it will be instructive to see how his spokespersons respond to this latest series of disturbing admissions.

Gen. McChrystal, meanwhile, has been increasingly promoted in the press as the man who could save Afghanistan, ironically, thanks in part to a new benevolent approach to the country's civilians. As reporter Gareth Porter recently observed, "McChrystal has recently acquired the image of a master strategist of the population-sensitive counterinsurgency, reducing civilian casualties from air strikes and insisting that troops avoid firing when civilians might be hit during the recent offensive in Helmand Province. One recent press story even referred to a 'McChrystal Doctrine' that focuses on 'winning over civilians rather than killing insurgents.'"

This image has come at the same time that McChrystal was recently quoted as saying, about U.S./NATO checkpoints: "we have shot an amazing number of people, but to my knowledge, none has ever proven to be a threat." This remark came during a recent video-conference with U.S. troops; a spokesperson for the general tried to contextualize it in an e-mail to Talking Points Memo: "The general was urging his forces to exercise courageous restraint (by suggesting that it is unlikely that erratic behavior at a checkpoint constitutes a threat) while also expressing sympathy for the confusing and threatening situations in which both soldiers and Afghans find themselves."

Despite McChrystal's supposed empathy and dedication to innocent Afghan life, civilian casualties have remained steady. According to the same New York Times report that quoted McChrystal on the "amazing" number of Afghans shot by soldiers, "shootings from convoys and checkpoints involving American, NATO and Afghan forces accounted for 36 civilian deaths last year, down from 41 in 2008, according to the United Nations. With at least 30 Afghans killed since last June in 95 such shootings, according to military statistics, the rate shows no signs of abating."

Nonetheless, the mythical McChrystal was recently the subject of a cover story in *The Atlantic*, tellingly titled "Man Versus Afghanistan," which portrays him as the man who will do in Afghanistan that proved impossible for the Soviets and the British. The profile is replete with literary, historical, and even religious references ("Doubt," T. E. Lawrence wrote in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), is 'our modern crown of thorns.' The Special Operations forces that McChrystal led in Iraq were not so afflicted) and McChrystal is described by one source as "the singularly most impressive military officer I ever served with." He is a man who, according to the article's author, Robert D. Kaplan, has "never submitted to fate," a man whose daily physical routine alone "expresses an unyielding, almost cultic determination." (The "oft-documented regime," Kaplan dutifully writes, consists of "running eight miles a day, eating one meal a day, and sleeping four hours a night.")

Fawning media profiles aside, as Gareth Porter points out, "there is a glaring contradiction between McChrystal's new counterinsurgency credentials and his actual policy toward the politically explosive issue of night raids on private homes by Special Operations Forces (SOF) units targeting suspected Taliban."