

Afghan government accuses US of torture and false imprisonment

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10 January 2012

The crisis besetting the US/NATO occupation of Afghanistan has been deepened over recent days. Its own puppet government, headed by President Hamid Karzai, has publicly accused the American military of torture and arbitrary detention at the largest US-run prison in the country.

Karzai made the allegations last Thursday, reportedly with no prior warning to the Obama administration or US and NATO commanders in Afghanistan. He claimed that an investigation by an Afghan government commission had found “many cases” of abuse at the Parwan detention centre at Bagram Air Base, to the north of Kabul. He declared the situation was an affront to “Afghan sovereignty” and demanded that Parwan, along with all other detention centres being operated by foreign forces, be turned over to Afghan control within one month.

On Saturday, Gul Rahman Qazi, the head of the Afghan government commission, accused the US of abuses ranging from physical beatings, unwarranted cavity searches, light and sleep deprivation and exposing detainees to freezing conditions. He declared that the vast majority of the 2,700 prisoners at Parwan in US custody had not been charged with any offense. He claimed they were being held indefinitely with no prospect of a trial as the only evidence against them consisted of unverified American intelligence.

Qazi also claimed that some of the prisoners were people who had been acquitted of alleged crimes by Afghan courts or who had served out their sentences, but who the US had still refused to release. According to reports, the detainees include a number of alleged high- and mid-level Taliban insurgent leaders, as well as non-Afghan alleged members of Al Qaeda. US officials subsequently confirmed that only 300 of the Parwan detainees have actually been charged.

Qazi repeated Karzai’s demand for the handover of all prisoners and his invocations of national sovereignty. He declared that “foreign forces are not allowed to keep prisons in Afghanistan” and “we have the right to rule on our own soil”. Another of Karzai’s commissioners, Sayed Noorullah, restated that Parwan had to be handed over to the Afghan government “as soon as possible,” and that all prisoners being held without evidence “have the right to be freed”.

Karzai’s accusations, which will further discredit the claims that the US-led occupation is bringing democracy and human rights to Afghanistan, were clearly unexpected in Washington. The US response has been subdued initially. American embassy and State Department spokesmen said only that the US will investigate the torture allegations and will work with the Karzai government to ensure the “responsible” transition of prisons to Afghan control, without committing to any timetable.

Off-the-record, however, Afghan and American officials told the *New York Times* that Karzai’s actions were linked to his suspicions of the Obama administration’s pursuit of a peace settlement with sections of the Taliban insurgency as part of its plans to withdraw most US troops by the end of 2014. A Taliban liaison office is being opened in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar with US backing to facilitate talks. Any deal would require Karzai and others who have worked closely with the occupation to enter into a power-sharing arrangement with their erstwhile enemies and accept a significant reduction in their privileges. Karzai, unnamed officials told the *Times*, believed he was being “cut out and worked around”.

While accusations of torture against US and NATO forces are entirely credible, Karzai’s profession of concern over the treatment of prisoners, let alone over

Afghanistan's sovereignty, is cynical in the extreme. They only underscore the brutality of the entire imperialist-dominated regime created by the US and NATO invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

For over a decade, the venal elements making up his regime have collaborated with the mass killing and brutal repression of all resistance to foreign occupation of the country among the Afghan people. A major investigation by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which was published in October 2011, uncovered horrific prisoner abuse at Afghan government-run detention centres across the country. The UN specifically accused the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Karzai's intelligence agency, of systematically using torture to extract confessions and information.

Even before the UN report was released, US and NATO forces claimed to have stopped handing over prisoners to Afghan authorities in certain parts of the country last July. They faced the prospect of war crimes' charges under international law provisions that prohibit the transfer of detainees to a state authority when a substantial risk of torture exists. As a result, the number of detainees being held by the US military and NATO contingents has swelled.

Ahead of any talks and potential settlement with the Taliban, Karzai's main concern in condemning prisoner abuse appears to be to distance himself from the occupation forces and at least lessen the widespread view within the Afghan population that he is nothing more than a corrupt puppet of Washington. Alongside his rhetoric over control of prisons and claims he will release detainees, he has repeated his demands that the US cease special forces' night raids on alleged insurgent targets, as they result in civilian deaths.

Tensions between the Karzai government and the occupation forces will only increase in coming months. The US military plans to complement the overtures to the Taliban factions that are prepared to talk with major offensives in eastern Afghanistan against the so-called Haqqani insurgent network, which until now has rejected any peace negotiations. Air strikes and raids will result in the loss of hundreds more civilian lives and thousands more detentions, generating further popular opposition to Karzai.

The emphasis on the Haqqani network will also deepen the political crisis that the Obama

administration's policies have provoked in Pakistan. Constant, illegal US attacks on the tribal region of northwest Pakistan, from which Haqqani fighters allegedly operate, have generated broad hatred of American imperialism in the population and recriminations against the pro-US government in Islamabad. To contain the public uproar over the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers by US gunships in November, President Asif Ali Zardari felt compelled to shut down the US supply routes into Afghanistan through Pakistan. After close to six weeks, they have still not been reopened.

Despite the volatile situation in Pakistan, the US military announced on the weekend that attacks into the country by Predator drones and other aircraft, which were put on hold after the November incident, will be resuming soon. US spokesman Captain John Kirby told the press, "the safe havens that exist in Pakistan are still an obstacle to our ultimate success in Afghanistan".

On both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border, the reckless and incendiary policies of the Obama administration have set the stage for another year of carnage and deepening mass opposition.



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