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# U.S. military special forces kill 21 anti-Taliban fighters

By Jonathan S. Landay  
 Knight Ridder Newspapers

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (KRT) — U.S. military commanders have acknowledged to Afghan officials that U.S. special forces mistakenly attacked and killed 21 anti-Taliban fighters last week in southern Uruzgan Province, a senior Afghan official said Thursday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The incident, which is still under investigation by the U.S. military, raises serious questions about the quality of intelligence in Afghanistan and the U.S. military's ability to navigate the rivalries among Afghan factions in the search for Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants.

The Afghan official, a member of the shura, or advisory council, of Kandahar Province who is close to Afghanistan's U.S.-backed interim administration, said the American commanders made the admission recently when he met them at the U.S. military base at Kandahar airport.

The Afghan official's comments provided further support for allegations that one of the largest U.S. ground operations in Afghanistan to date backfired in a bloody friendly fire incident.

"It was a mistake, an intelligence mistake, and these things happen," the Afghan official said.

His statement appeared to contradict the Pentagon's public statements.

On Wednesday, Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that while the U.S. military is investigating the Jan. 24 attack, he had seen no evidence that U.S. special forces hit the wrong target.

Marine Corps Maj. Ralph Mills, a spokesman for the U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Fla., said Thursday that the U.S. investigation of the incident was continuing and that he had nothing to add to what Myers had said.

In addition to using data from U.S. assets such as spy satellites, U.S. commanders are relying on information from the warlords who divided Afghanistan into personal fiefdoms after driving the Taliban from power in December with U.S. support.

But U.S. officials have said that on several previous occasions, local warlords have duped U.S. forces into attacking their rivals by falsely identifying them as Taliban or fighters of bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist network.

The Jan. 24 operation in Uruzgan, a remote mountain village with the same

name as the province, coincided with a dispute between two factions over the post of district administrator.

There is no hard evidence that either faction duped U.S. commanders into launching the raid. But the senior Afghan official, echoing the belief of villagers and local officials who were interviewed by Knight Ridder, said he believes an Afghan source erroneously identified Uruzgan as a Taliban stronghold.

"The problem is among the Afghans," he asserted.


He said he was assured that such a mistake "is not going to happen any more."

The Pentagon said the operation targeted two Taliban compounds, vehicles and a large weapons cache. Twenty-seven senior Taliban leaders were arrested and taken for interrogation to a detention center at Kandahar airport, it said.

A visit last weekend to Uruzgan by Knight Ridder found that the attack by Green Berets backed by helicopters and an AC-130 gunship devastated the district administration compound and the village's only high school.

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## Career Center

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After a student group or department receives funding for an event, it must submit a report about its activity to the Career Council. The report must contain an estimate of the number of students involved, the student's reactions and how the event could be improved if the organization decides to participate the following year.

"We basically want to know how many people benefited from the event," Smith said. "These events are intended to be an extraordinary opportunity for students to explore and do networking within their career."

The Office of Multicultural Affairs is just one example of a student group that was able to host a career reception Tuesday with the help of the Career Center. Twenty employers and 65 students attended the event.

"The collaborative effort is impressive. What makes this event successful is partnering with the Career Center as well as the Office of Student Life, and it is an example of how these departments' efforts can really work," Associate Director of Multicultural Affairs Randy Choy said. "Just listening to the sound and interaction of this event can tell you that."

The Career Center will not be receiving grant money for

2002-03 because of the Supreme Court's Southworth v. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System decision, which changed the process for allocating student incidental fees across the country. This year, the ASUO Programs Finance Committee decided the Career Center's 2002-03 budget. The Career Center did not include this career program in their budget request to the PFC.

Smith said he hopes to sustain the program for the next seven years with funds from previously awarded grant money.

E-mail reporter Danielle Gillespie at daniellegillespie@dailyemerald.com.

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