
US STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN 'RECIPE FOR DISASTER,' PENTAGON REPORT WARNS

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US forces in Afghanistan appear to have plunged into profound confusion amid an escalating Taliban insurgency, a heavily redacted Pentagon report has found. "It's not a strategy and, in fact, it's a recipe for disaster in that kind of kinetic environment," one soldier told investigators.

"How far do you want to go?" is not a proper response to "How far do you want us to go?" one special forces member was quoted as saying in a report into the US airstrikes on a hospital in Kunduz last year, according to Reuters.

The US airstrike took lives of 42 people, including patients and medical staff, on October 3 when an American AC-130 Spectre gunship opened fire on the trauma center operated by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in the city of Kunduz. It made several passes, having fired 211 shells at the compound in 29 minutes before commanders realized the mistake and ordered crew to hold their fire. MSF said their staffers reached NATO HQ in Afghanistan and asked to cease fire immediately, but got zero result.

Twelve US military personnel were issued administrative punishments □ but no criminal charges □ over the bombing of the hospital, officials revealed to media in March.

The 700-page report, much of it blacked out for security reasons, sheds light on how the rules are not clearly understood even by some troops on the ground, Reuters reported.

"It's not a strategy and, in fact, it's a recipe for disaster in that kind of kinetic environment," one soldier, whose identity was not revealed in the report, was quoted as saying. He reportedly added that his unit, meant to advise and assist Afghan forces without engaging in combat, asked for commanders to clarify the rules governing their mission at least three times.

Some say the roots of confusion actually lie in politics.

"The rules of engagement are trapped in the jaws of political confusion about the mission," a senior Western official, who declined to be named, told Reuters.

"Nobody in Western capitals seems willing to admit that Afghanistan is a worsening war zone and ... that their troops are still battling out a combat mission on a daily basis," he added.

General Joseph Votel, head of US Central Command, told a Pentagon news conference last month that to reduce future misunderstandings the US military has updated equipment and retrained 9,000 troops on the rules of engagement following the incident in Kunduz.

General John Nicholson said in an exclusive interview with Reuters last month that fighting the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and even Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) has been taking up all the time and resources of the Afghan government forces, putting the US plan to train a self-sufficient army behind schedule.

The US role in Afghanistan has dragged out much longer than originally anticipated, with President Barack Obama canceling the initial plan to withdraw the majority of troops in 2014 in exchange for a blueprint to scale back forces by early 2017.

At that point, 5,500 troops would remain in the country to work with Afghan forces □ down from the current 9,800 soldiers. Plans to completely remove all US troops have not been announced.

Obama's decision to delay the withdrawal of troops was seen as a U-turn from his campaign promise to bring soldiers home, and his repeated rhetoric that he does not support the idea of endless war.

Kaynak/Source: