

# US-trained Afghan intelligence agents, elite troops reported joining ISIS

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Intelligence agents and elite counterinsurgency troops trained by the CIA and the Pentagon during the 20-year US occupation of Afghanistan are reportedly joining the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K).

The *Wall Street Journal* this week reported on the influx of these US-trained forces into ISIS-K, citing unnamed Taliban leaders, officials of the ousted US puppet regime and people who knew agents and soldiers who had joined the group.

In a November 1 interview with *Foreign Policy*, Rahmatullah Nabil, former chief of the US-backed Afghan regime's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), reported the same phenomenon: "Of the ANDSF [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] who were left behind, I am receiving reports from different areas that, in order to have some protection, they see the Islamic State as a better platform for themselves. And I think the Islamic State is accepting them."

In its report, the *Journal* noted that "Importantly, these new recruits bring to Islamic State critical expertise in intelligence-gathering and warfare techniques, potentially strengthening the extremist organization's ability to contest Taliban supremacy."

ISIS-K is engaged in a brutal campaign of terrorist bombings against civilian targets aimed at destabilizing the Taliban government. On Tuesday, it claimed responsibility for an attack on the Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan hospital, the largest hospital in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, which killed 25 people and wounded more than a dozen others. The attack included a suicide bombing and an invasion of the hospital by gunmen, who shot a number of wounded Taliban fighters in their hospital beds.

This latest attack follows suicide bombings in Kandahar in the south and Kunduz in the north, which claimed well over 100 lives. In both cities, the targets were prayer services at Shiite mosques. ISIS-K identified the attacker in Kunduz as ethnic Uyghur, the largest population in China's western Xinjiang province, which borders Afghanistan.

Given US imperialism's record in Afghanistan and the CIA's intimate connections to the emergence of ISIS, there

is every reason to ask whether this bloody campaign is backed by Washington with the aim of destabilizing Afghanistan and preventing the emergence of any regime not under its thumb.

The US armed intervention in Afghanistan began more than 40 years ago with "Operation Cyclone," in which Washington—together with its allies Saudi Arabia and Pakistan—armed and funded Islamist mujahedeen fighters in a war against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul. The largest operation ever mounted by the CIA, it provoked a civil war that ultimately claimed the lives of millions. It also gave rise to both Al Qaeda, which was allied with the CIA, and the Taliban, which Washington initially supported when it took power in 1996.

In October 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan on the pretext of retaliating for the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington, which were blamed on Al Qaeda. It was the start of a two-decade occupation in which some 800,000 US troops participated under four presidencies, cost over \$2 trillion and led to the deaths and maiming of thousands of Americans and hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

A decade into the "global war on terror," which was also the pretext for the even bloodier 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Obama administration launched a pair of new wars, in Libya and Syria. In both of these wars, Washington shifted from its supposed global crusade against Al Qaeda into supporting, financing and arming Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias in the toppling of the Libyan government of Muammar Gaddafi and the attempt to bring down that of Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

In 2014, investigative journalist Seymour Hersh exposed the existence of a CIA "rat line" running from Libya's eastern port city of Benghazi through southern Turkey and into Syria, which was used to smuggle in weapons and foreign fighters to wage the US-backed war for regime change.

There are strong indications that a similar "rat line" into Afghanistan was created following the rollback of ISIS by the US military along with Iraqi Shia militias, Syrian

government forces and US-backed Kurdish militias.

A report issued in June by the United Nations cites information that the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), an Islamist separatist group dedicated to carving out a Uyghur state in Xinjiang, China had “established corridors for moving fighters between the Syrian Arab Republic, where the group exists in far larger numbers, and Afghanistan, to reinforce its combat strength” and “facilitate the movement of fighters from Afghanistan to China.” The ETIM has aligned itself with ISIS-K against the Taliban government.

How ETIM and other “foreign fighters” could “establish corridors” into an Afghanistan occupied by the US and NATO, the UN report does not explain.

Among those charging that ISIS-K is a creature of the US is Washington’s longtime puppet Hamid Karzai, who was president in the Kabul regime from 2001 until 2014. In 2017, he told *Al Jazeera*, “In my view, under the full [US] presence, surveillance, military, political, intelligence, Daesh [the Arabic acronym for ISIS] has emerged. And for two years, the Afghan people came, cried loud about their suffering, of violations. Nothing was done.”

In the same period, Karzai told *Voice of America*: “I consider Daesh [the US’] tool.” He added, “I do not differentiate at all between Daesh and America.”

There were numerous reports from Afghanistan of unmarked helicopters flying weapons and supplies into areas occupied by ISIS-K. At the time, the US and NATO were in full control of Afghanistan’s airspace.

For its part, the Taliban has alleged a “foreign hand” in the recent terrorist bombings and has rejected US proposals for cooperation in fighting ISIS, charging that the group had grown with US support.

In addition to the former intelligence agents and special forces troops that have joined ISIS, the US evacuated from Afghanistan thousands of commandos of the so-called Zero units that operated under the supervision of the CIA, carrying out night raids, assassinations and other war crimes. This provides the US intelligence agency with a pool of recruits for an intervention aimed at provoking a new civil war in Afghanistan.

Washington is pursuing a policy designed to provoke maximum instability and upheaval in the country that it occupied for 20 years. It has refused to allow access by the Taliban government to close to \$10 billion held by US financial institutions, and has cut off all aid, which previously accounted for 80 percent of the Afghan government’s budget. The result has been an economic meltdown and the paralyzing of the country’s health care system as well as foreign aid groups on the ground. This, as the World Bank reports that 14 million people—one out of

three Afghans—are on the brink of starvation, and winter is approaching with the threat of even worse conditions of famine.

US imperialism views Afghanistan through the prism of its declared military strategy centered on “great power” confrontation with China and Russia. Just as US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski promoted the CIA-orchestrated mujahedeen war of the 1970s and 1980s as a means of giving the Soviet Union its “own Vietnam,” today Washington sees an Afghanistan in chaos undermining Chinese and Russian interests in Central Asia and potentially provoking terrorist campaigns against both countries.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon issued a report Wednesday exonerating the US military for the August 29 airstrike in Kabul that killed 10 innocent Afghans, including an employee of a Western humanitarian organization and seven children. The US military initially claimed that it had killed four ISIS-K bombers.

The report found no “violations of law or of the law of war,” but rather “an aggregate process breakdown, in which many people are involved.” It insisted that the drone missile massacre had to be seen in the context of the attack at the Hamid Karzai International Airport that killed 13 US service members and resulted in the deaths of scores of Afghan civilians. In the wake of this attack, there was a US drive to exact revenge.

This Pentagon report constitutes a deadly warning that such massacres will continue under the mantle of the US military’s so-called “over the horizon” operations against alleged “terrorists” in Afghanistan.

After more than four decades, it is apparent that the tragic encounter of the Afghan people with US imperialism is far from over.



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