



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on July 25, 2017

## U.S. Airstrike Kills at Least 16 Afghan National Police Members

A U.S. airstrike in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand killed at least 16 Afghan National Police (ANP) force members in a "friendly fire" incident on July 21, said Afghan and American officials.

*The Hill* quoted a July 21 statement from U.S. Forces Afghanistan that said, "We would like to express our deepest condolences to the families affected by this unfortunate incident.... During a U.S.-supported [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] operation, aerial fires resulted in the deaths of the friendly Afghan forces who were gathered in a compound."



An AP report that same day cited a statement from Helmand provincial Governor Hayatullah Hayat, who said that at least two Afghan commanders died in the NATO airstrike.

AP noted that much of Helmand province is under the control of the Taliban, and the Afghan national security forces have been waging fierce battles to retake the territory. NATO and U.S. troops are in Helmand to assist the Afghan troops, noted the report.

The *New York Times* reported that the Afghan National Police have been fighting a difficult battle since 2014, as the resurgent Taliban militants have regained territory in the province. There are officially about 8,000 members of the police force in Helmand Province, but United States Marine officers advising the Afghan forces in the province say many of them are difficult to locate, and many have been reduced to protecting a security rim around the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

The *Times* noted that a force of about 300 Marines in Helmand is advising the Afghan forces, and trying to help the Afghan Army to recapture some of the territory lost to the Taliban. However, the military gains have proved difficult to sustain because the police forces have been unable to hold recaptured areas once the Taliban have been expelled from them.

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As for the state of the overall war in Afghanistan, *The Hill* reported that Defense Secretary James Mattis promised to deliver a new strategy to Congress for the 16-year-old war by mid-July. The strategy is expected to include a plan to send a few thousand more U.S. troops to the country.

When he was asked on July 20 about whether more troops will deploy, President Trump said, "We'll see."

Later that day, Mattis told reporters he's "sure the president will make a decision soon" when asked about the status of the strategy.

Those who supported Trump's candidacy for the presidency partly because he *sounded* noninterventionist during his presidential campaign are undoubtedly troubled by the above statements.



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Even after the election, Trump still attempted to maintain a noninterventionist image.

A Reuters report last December 6 was headlined, “Trump lays out non-interventionist U.S. military policy.” The report began:

President-elect Donald Trump laid out a U.S. military policy ... that would avoid interventions in foreign conflicts and instead focus heavily on defeating the Islamic State militancy.

In the latest stop on a “thank you” tour of states critical to his Nov. 8 election win, Trump introduced his choice for defense secretary, General James Mattis, to a large crowd in this city near the Fort Bragg military base, which has deployed soldiers to 90 countries around the world.

“We will stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about, that we shouldn’t be involved with,” Trump said. “Instead, our focus must be on defeating terrorism and destroying ISIS, and we will.”

Trump’s rhetoric was similar to what he said during the election campaign when he railed against the war in Iraq.

When we compare Trump’s statements last year to what he and his defense secretary are saying now about U.S. troop involvement in Afghanistan, it seems that it was little more than how Reuters described it: rhetoric.

In recent years, it has been difficult to find any politicians will to speak out against sending U.S. troops to Afghanistan (and elsewhere) other than the father-and-son duo of former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) and Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.).

When President George W. Bush first sought congressional authorization to send troops to Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks, the elder Paul made a statement on the floor of the House on September 14, 2001. In his statement, Paul noted that the Taliban was not a country, and “to declare war against a group that is not a country makes the clear declaration of war more complex.”

After stating his objections, Paul relented and voted to give the president the authority to use force in Afghanistan. He explained his support for the resolution to use force by saying it was the only option available and he believed doing nothing was unthinkable.

After the military victory over the Taliban was achieved, Paul began attempting to rein in U.S. military presence there to avoid the prolonged war he cautioned against back in 2001.

For years after the initial U.S.-led invasion, Congressman Paul continually noted that no war has been constitutionally authorized within Afghanistan — only the use of force against those responsible for the 9/11 attacks (al-Qaeda).

Paul retired from his House seat in 2013, but has continued to voice his opinions about U.S. foreign policy on a regular basis. His son Rand became a U.S. senator representing Kentucky in 2011, and has been outspoken on foreign policy and other issues.

In an October 2015 interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, Rand Paul — who was a presidential candidate at the time — maintained that the United States should no longer be fighting the war in Afghanistan and that “the Afghans need to step it up and defend themselves.”

The Kentucky senator, in true noninterventionist fashion, said the United States should avoid a “perpetual war” in Afghanistan and said Afghans “should be able to defend themselves,” as the United States has poured billions of dollars in aid into Afghanistan.



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Those who share Paul's noninterventionist principles will hope that President Trump will consider the senator's opinions more valuable than those of his CFR-member National Security Advisor Herbert McMaster.

However, those hopes are looking less promising as time goes on.

*Photo of Afghan National Police*

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