

# The World; Taliban Hangs Pro-Government Chief in South Afghanistan

Kazem, Halima

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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Because of the instability in [Zabol], almost no development or reconstruction has occurred there since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan that ousted the Taliban government.

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## FULL TEXT

Taliban militants kidnapped and hanged a pro-government tribal chief in southern Afghanistan, government officials said Saturday.

Malik Agha Jan and five other family members were abducted in a southern district of Zabol province. Some accounts said they were seized Thursday, while others said Friday.

"The relatives were released shortly after being kidnapped, but Malik Agha's body was found on Friday," said Gul Habib Jan, the local police chief. As for a possible motive, he said: "We know that he was a strong supporter of President Karzai."

An unofficial Taliban spokesman told reporters that the tribal chief was killed because he was a spy for the Americans.

The killing marked the second time in a week that a local leader accused of having ties to the U.S. military had been slain in Afghanistan's restive south. In addition, suspected Taliban rebels have killed four Islamic clerics since late May, apparently because they supported the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai.

Zabol is home to many Taliban leaders who have strong tribal ties throughout the province. As a result, Karzai's administration has had a difficult time establishing a stable and loyal local government in Zabol.

"At least four districts of Zabol province are controlled by Taliban and Al Qaeda groups at nighttime," Latfullah Mashal, an Interior Ministry spokesman, said in a recent interview.

Because of the instability in Zabol, almost no development or reconstruction has occurred there since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan that ousted the Taliban government.

Zabol's porous border with Pakistan is considered a major gateway into Afghanistan for foreign Al Qaeda recruits.

The U.S. military operates an intelligence network in the province and occasionally raids villages and homes. U.S. forces have engaged in heavy fighting in Zabol since May, killing more than 100 suspected rebels.

The fighting seems to have fostered anti-American sentiment in Zabol and fueled support for the Taliban.

In other developments Saturday, the U.S. military released 20 Afghans held in Kabul, the capital, after they were determined to no longer pose a threat. The detainees were all from Zabol and Kandahar provinces; some had been held for more than a year without any formal charges.

"Eight months ago, the U.S. military did a sweep of my village in Zabol," said 35-year-old Noorullah. "I am just a farmer, but they didn't care. They couldn't tell the difference, so they took everyone they wanted to."

The father of four said he had not been in contact with his family since December. "They most likely think I am dead," he said.

Another detainee quietly described the way he was treated in the jail.

"We were tortured and beaten up when we were first picked up and taken to local holding facilities," said Mohammed, the detainee. "But later in Kandahar and Bagram prison they were civilized to us."

The U.S. military operates two prisons on its main bases in Afghanistan. One is in the southern province of Kandahar and another in the Bagram district of Kabul province.

Human rights organizations have accused the U.S. of holding prisoners incommunicado and mistreating them. U.S. military officials have repeatedly said that all detainees are treated with respect and dignity.

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