



# SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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## Of Concern

### Michael Yon

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Kandahar, Afghanistan

Yesterday, an American involved in the war effort handed me a document. It was an email from a Lieutenant Colonel in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in Afghanistan. His unit is in combat seven days a week. To be clear, I did not get the email from the officer and I have never met him.

The email is about the abysmal, unsafe conditions which some of our most dedicated troops are living in, at a remote base run by the Spanish military in Afghanistan. All deletions [xxx] are by me. I have the entire email. The serious and disturbing allegations are found in the second and third paragraphs.

Please note, that the failure to support permanent US troops at this Spanish base constitutes real negligence about their ultimate safety. And that comes on top of a degree of harassment that is shocking among allies.

The message begins:

Gentlemen,

I just finished spending a couple days with TF [xxx] at [xxx] and visiting all of our sites that we have troopers located at. Great progress continues to be made in the [xxx], but several items need some help ASAP:

[Para 1 deleted]

2) Qal E Naw: The Spanish are not interested in helping in anyway, and are trying to make us decide to leave based on their unacceptable treatment of Americans. Our refuelers [soldiers who refuel helicopters] that are living there have to run out, unroll the hoses, pull security, and roll everything back up. They have asked for gravel along the FLS as it is currently calf deep mud, but the Spanish refuse to make any improvements. They asked for a T barrier (just one) to put at a 45 degree angle outside the fence where the FARP [Forward Arming and Refueling Point; where helicopters land for ammo and gas] has to be set up so they can run for cover in case there is small arms fire, the Spanish say

no and refuse to make any improvements. They asked for a small gate where their billets are located so they can access the FARP directly rather than going a half mile loop to get out the gate, but the Spanish said no and refuse to make any improvements. They [sic] guys are living hard (we understand that) but have to do laundry by hand as all of their stuff is stolen if they turn it into the laundry, they discussed this with the Spanish, but they refuse to many any improvements.

USFOR-A needs to energize someone to develop a viable, enduring plan for this FARP that isn't reliant on the Spanish. This is a key hub for fuel (since we can't get trucks to [xxx] or [xxx]) so let's improve this location to better support those guys living out there on the edge by themselves. They refused to allow a Marine detachment that was dropped there to come into the wire or feed them overnight. Our refuelers had to fight the Spanish to bring them in and squeeze them into the two small tents that they have and give them MREs as they [sic] Spanish wouldn't feed them. Is this how we allow our Coalition partners to treat Americans?

3) BmG: Who ever briefed that they have gravel there has never been there. We arrived during a TIC [fighting] and a MEDEVAC mission. The aircraft have to land/park in a field that has no gravel and then they sink into the ground. They have to be moved everyday to pull them back out of the mud. If we can't get gravel, how about putting some AM2 matting, stakes and a couple of Red Horse guys on a CH-47 and fly them in to build a couple of pads just big enough to park an individual UH-60 on? We've been pushing the gravel issues since last fall and are no closer to a solution. Those guys are living in fighting positions. When it begins to warm up in the next month, that field will be untenable without gravel or AM2 matting. We don't want to lose MEDEVAC capability there because we couldn't put in two pads. We did a MEDEVAC [troop(s) wounded] and Hero [troop(s) killed] mission while I was there and the next day as well, let's not forget that they are on the tip of the spear, we owe them more.

I would like to discuss these Saturday to see what the way ahead is going to be.

ATW!

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On that note, the email closes.

So, our soldiers and Marines, living in rough conditions at the far tip of the spear, apparently are being treated with contempt, with all basic support denied, from laundry to the conditions of the field on which our troops do their thankless job. If this report is true, and I have no reason to doubt it, the Spanish are endangering the lives of our warriors by failing to provide basic safety.

To the extent that there is an international dimension to this potential problem, requiring a diplomatic solution, it deserves the immediate attention of our civilian leadership. Our able

Secretary of Defense will likely wish to investigate, and bring it up with our Spanish allies for any corrective measures that might be in order. I will personally see that this gets to Secretary Gates. When Secretary Gates gets wind, we can rest easy that proper attention is forthcoming.

Sincerely,

Michael Yon

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