



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 28, 2025

D.C. Shooting Suspect Lakanwal Led CIA-backed Force Accused of Crimes in Afghanistan

Rahmanullah Lakanwal, the suspect in Wednesday's shooting of two National Guardsmen in Washington, D.C., was a member of a U.S.-backed strike force in Afghanistan that has been accused of war crimes.

Lakanwal, 29, is accused of opening fire on a National Guard patrol Wednesday afternoon, shooting two Guard members before being shot and subdued. One of the victims, Specialist Sarah Beckstrom, 20, of Summersville, West Virginia, later [died](#) from her wounds. The other, Staff Sergeant Andrew Wolfe, 24, of Martinsburg, West Virginia, is "fighting for his life," President Donald Trump said Thursday.



AP Images
Police at the scene of the D.C. shooting

According to the [Associated Press](#), Lakanwal resided in Bellingham, Washington, with his wife and five children.

At a press conference Thursday, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia Jeanine Pirro [said](#), "What we know about [Lakanwal] is that he drove his vehicle across country from the state of Washington with the intended target of coming to our nation's capital," where he allegedly "opened fire without provocation, ambush-style, armed with a .357 Smith & Wesson revolver."

Zeros Not Heroes

But there's more to Lakanwal's story. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Ratcliffe told [Fox News](#) Wednesday that Lakanwal had done "prior work with the U.S. government, including CIA, as a member of a partner force in Kandahar."

Specifically, reported the AP:

A resident of the eastern Afghan province of Khost who identified himself as Lakanwal's cousin said Lakanwal was originally from the province and that he and his brother had worked in a special Afghan Army unit known as Zero Units in the southern province of Kandahar. A former official from the unit, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation, said Lakanwal was a team leader and his brother was a platoon leader.

Although the Zero Units were nominally under the control of the Afghan government's National Directorate of Security, they were "trained and equipped by the CIA. All their operations were conducted under the CIA command," a former senior Afghan general told [CBS News](#).

"The units were known in Afghanistan for their secrecy and alleged brutality," explained CBS, "and



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members were implicated in numerous extrajudicial killings of civilians, particularly during night raids.” Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a [report](#) documenting “14 cases in which CIA-backed Afghan strike forces committed serious abuses between late 2017 and mid-2019,” only a small portion of the time during which these forces were active.

HRW found that such forces “unlawfully targeted civilians” and “summarily executed persons taken into custody or forcibly disappeared them, not telling their families about their fate or whereabouts.” One diplomat familiar with the situation called the strike forces “death squads.”

Afghan special forces — supported and sometimes accompanied by U.S. forces — also raided medical facilities. “During these kill-or-capture operations,” claimed HRW, “the forces involved assaulted and, in some cases, killed medical staff; assaulted or killed accompanying civilian or noncombatant caregivers; and caused damage to the facilities.”

Escape Cause

The Zero Units were heavily involved in helping U.S. forces withdraw from Afghanistan in 2021. In the aftermath, they naturally feared reprisals from the new Afghan government and their fellow countrymen. Thus, the Biden administration invited them to America.

Wrote the AP:

Lakanwal entered the U.S. in 2021 through Operation Allies Welcome, a Biden administration program that evacuated and resettled tens of thousands of Afghans after the U.S. withdrawal from the country, officials said. Lakanwal applied for asylum during the Biden administration, but his asylum was approved under the Trump administration, [Afghan-resettlement group] #AfghanEvac said in a statement.

All told, more than 190,000 Afghans were admitted to the United States under Operation Allies Welcome and its successor program, Enduring Welcome, according to the [State Department](#).

Welcome Spat

Despite the fact that his administration had approved Lakanwal’s asylum application, Trump blamed his predecessor for allowing “unknown and unvetted foreigners” such as Lakanwal to enter the country.

However, according to [CNN](#):

A senior US official told CNN Lakanwal began working with the CIA around 2011 and, at the time, the agency would have conducted extensive vetting through a variety of databases — including the National Counterterrorism Center database — to determine if Lakanwal had any known ties to terrorist groups.

Afghans admitted to the US under Operation Allies Welcome underwent extensive vetting, despite claims to the contrary by Trump and his allies at the time. The official told CNN Lakanwal would have been among those vetted again in 2021 before being allowed to enter the US under the program.

“In terms of vetting, nothing came up,” the senior US official said. “He was clean on all checks.”

He would have undergone continuous, annual vetting, especially in the wake of the failed



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terror plot disrupted before the election last year in Oklahoma, which involved an Afghan evacuee, the official says.

Apparently, then, committing violent crimes, as Lakanwal almost certainly did in Afghanistan, does not disqualify one from entering and remaining in the United States as long as those crimes were committed at Uncle Sam's behest.

Aftermath Class

As a result of Wednesday's shooting, Trump requested another 500 National Guard troops be deployed to Washington, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [announced](#) a freeze on all Afghan immigration requests "pending further review of security and vetting protocols."

Meanwhile, Lakanwal's charges have been [upgraded](#) from assault with intent to kill to first-degree murder.

In addition, his presence in the country and his alleged crime serve as further evidence of the dangers of foreign intervention.



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