

Civilian casualties mount in Afghanistan

Kate Randall
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Many news sources report mounting civilian casualties in Afghanistan since the US launched air strikes against the country last Sunday. The *Afghan Islamic Press* (AIP) reports that more than 250 civilians have been killed so far, while the Taliban says casualties have surpassed 300. *USA Today* reports that Western diplomats in Pakistan have received unconfirmed reports from aid workers in Afghanistan that the number may be far higher, and rising with each day's air raids.

Afghan refugees arriving daily in Pakistan speak of the destruction wrought by the US bombing raids. Khawaja Ahmad, 25, who arrived from Jalalabad with her two older brothers on Tuesday, told *USA Today* that she witnessed dozens of homes destroyed and many injured children: "We see only our mothers and children dying. Why do you kill us? What have our civilians done to you?"

On Thursday, thousands of Afghan refugees fled their homes in Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad after US jets carried out the heaviest bombing since the US launched its attack last Sunday. They carried whatever personal belongings they could, traveling on donkeys and in taxis and trucks. At least 1.1 million of Afghanistan's 26 million people are fleeing areas that might be hit by US air raids. Riza Kahn, a fruit merchant from Jalalabad, told *USA Today*, "People everywhere are on the run. They are trying to hide, wherever they can. But the bombs are everywhere."

Stephanie Bunker, spokesperson for the Office of the UN Coordinator for Afghanistan, said that these refugees have little or no access to food, water or shelter. She told *USA Today* that since September 11 nearly three-quarters of Jalalabad's 100,000 residents, half of Kandahar's 100,000 residents and one-fifth of Kabul's 1.8 million residents have fled.

Those who can afford it are heading for the Pakistan border, and others are fleeing to the countryside. UN

officials report that many of those who lack the resources to leave the country are widows, the elderly and the extremely impoverished. Ms. Bunker commented, "The ones who have stayed are the poorest of the poor. They're living on bread and water." Afghan refugees report widespread devastation to civilian areas of the country, including the shutoff of water and electricity in many areas.

AIP reports that at least 100 people were killed or missing following US air attacks on the village of Kourram, 35 kilometers to the west of Jalalabad on Wednesday, October 10. Twelve others were taken to a Jalalabad hospital. An area resident said that the village was virtually destroyed following three nighttime raids on the area by US jets. The village comprised 25 houses that have now been completely destroyed. Taliban sources told AIP that 50 bodies had been pulled from the rubble so far.

According to UN officials, civilian deaths on Wednesday also included 20 in the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif and 10 in the southern city of Kandahar.

Ten civilians were killed when an American missile hit their home in a residential neighborhood of Kabul early Thursday morning, according to AIP. Another report said at least 18, mostly women and children, were killed and more than 30 injured in an attack on Konduz Thursday morning in several air and missile attacks on the city.

According to AIP, more than 200 people were killed on Thursday when a bomb struck the village of Kadam, about 40 kilometers west of Jalalabad. Kadam has been the target of repeated air strikes, lying near what the US has cited as a terrorist training camp. The Taliban told AIP, "So far 160 bodies have been recovered, mostly women and children. This is not an exaggeration. More bodies are still being recovered."

Abdul Salam Zaef, the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, told reporters in Islamabad that a bombing

raid early Thursday morning killed about 100 civilians in a village in the Torgar region, near Jalalabad. He said the casualties also included 15 people killed at a mosque in Jalalabad Wednesday night.

The capital city of Kabul came under sustained bombardment in the early morning hours of Friday, in what residents described as a combined plane and missile assault. An Agence France-Presse (AFP) reporter in Kabul counted 10 explosions, as planes flew over the city in numerous waves, beginning at 3:15 a.m. “At times there were no planes but still explosions, so there must have been some missiles coming in as well,” the AFP correspondent reported. He said that some of the blasts were felt inside the city.

The AIP reported that several houses in a residential neighborhood were flattened by a cruise missile during raids that went on for most of the night around Kabul and its airport.

Truck drivers arriving from Kabul at a fruit market in Peshawar, Pakistan described to the Scottish newspaper *The Scotsman* the conditions faced by residents in Afghanistan’s capital city following consecutive nights of bombardment. Aqbal Anwar said, “After the first night’s bombing, they were able to go about their business in the day before sheltering at night, but now the attacks are in daylight as well. This is terrorism to the people of Afghanistan. It is America and Britain who are the real terrorists.”

Another driver said, “The situation is very bad. The people will never forgive America for these attacks because innocent people are being hit and killed and they have no defenses. I saw a house which had been destroyed and we hear of people who have been injured and killed. It is not just military targets that are being hit. The Americans cannot win because there is nothing for them to bomb and they cannot kill everyone in Afghanistan.”

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told the press Thursday: “Everyone in this county knows that the United States of America does not target civilians.” While denying Washington was targeting civilians, he said they were inevitable in any military conflict.

Britain’s International Development Secretary Clare Short on Friday flatly denied that Afghan civilians had been killed: “Clearly there is propaganda being fed out.... Information moves across the borders in and out and there are refugees and families, and it is widely

understood amongst Afghanistan refugees that there have not been civilian casualties.”

Two US aircraft carriers in the Arabian Sea continue to launch strike aircraft and heavy bombing was reported to be continuing around Kabul. Rumsfeld told reporters Thursday that the US had hit unidentified cave complexes with an array of precision munitions. These weapons including GBU-28 “bunker busters”—5,000-pound laser-guided bombs designed to penetrate buried concrete structures.



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