

Reports indicate over 150 civilians killed in Afghanistan during past week

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More than 150 civilians were killed in the past week from US-led airstrikes and combat in Afghanistan, according to several reports.

In the Bala Boluk district of the western province of Farah, 108 civilians, including women and children, were killed from airstrikes on Friday according to a tribal council chief. Haji Khudai Rahm told the *New York Times* on Saturday, “NATO soldiers, along with the Afghan National Army and people from the national police, came to Shewan Village and told us they needed to search three or four houses. As we talked, a firefight began and 20 houses were destroyed when the planes dropped bombs.”

Rahm said that the villagers were still digging through the rubble of the destroyed homes in search of more bodies.

In the eastern province of Kunar, US-led airstrikes killed 35 civilians, according to a Reuters report. Eleven were killed on Thursday, including nine who were relatives of a resident named Mohammad Nabi.

Another airstrike followed on Friday, killing another 25 “while they buried the bodies of those killed on Thursday,” Reuters reported.

According to the Associated Press, two NATO soldiers and two Afghan soldiers were also killed. The Afghan Ministry of Defense said that 37 insurgents had been killed in fighting, in addition to the civilians.

In response to these reports of civilian casualties, the US and NATO officials pleaded ignorance. Representing NATO, Major John Thomas said, “We’re aware of the reports of civilian casualties but none of it tracks with the information we have, which is pretty extensive. In both cases, we had good reconnaissance before and after.”

Thomas also claimed that the US-led forces made a “significant effort” to move civilians out of the area.

The response from Thomas follows the standard claims made by US officials in response to civilian deaths. The US occupation relies on the fact that there are no western journalists in these regions to report and document US atrocities. Abdul Qadir Dadeq, an official in the provincial council of Farah, said, “the area is under the control of the enemy. No one can go to Bala Baluk to find out the exact number of casualties. I cannot go there, human rights officers can’t go there, government officials can’t go there.”

Local villagers in the Farah district have, however, invited government officials to visit the area to confirm the civilian deaths.

Civilian casualties due to airstrikes from US and NATO forces have surged in recent months, amidst a renewed offensive in areas of the south and west. In an attempt to gain some form of control of parts of the country outside of Kabul, personnel-strapped US and NATO forces have relied on bombings, which often take the form of collective punishment designed to terrorize the population.

Any villages that are considered to be associated with the Taliban or the insurgency in Afghanistan, or which are simply unfortunate enough to be located near areas where US forces engage in combat, are subject to attack.

A report in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 6 noted, “After more than five years of increasingly intense warfare, the conflict in Afghanistan reached a grim milestone in the first half of this year: US troops and their NATO allies killed more civilians than insurgents did, according to several independent tallies.”

According to the United Nations mission in Afghanistan, 314 civilians have been killed by US and NATO troops in 2007, compared to 279 attributed to insurgents. This figure is no doubt an underestimation.

According to the *Times*, it does not include 45 reported deaths in Helmand province in late June, and it also does not include the most recent reports.

The *Times* noted that US forces often resort to indiscriminate retaliation when attacked. “When allied forces come under fire from a walled compound of the kind that dots every Afghan village, the likeliest response is an airstrike—a strategy that exposes Western troops to less danger than moving in on foot,” the newspaper noted.

Andul Matim, a parliament member from Helmand province said, “We see whole families killed together in their homes—mothers, babies, everyone.”

Not all the civilian casualties come from airstrikes, however. Attempting to put US actions in the best possible light, the *Times* wrote, “Another common insurgent tactic is suicide car bombings aimed at military convoys. In response, jittery troops sometimes fire on civilians who are merely driving erratically or who accidentally come between military vehicles.”

In other words, US troops tend to shoot at civilians whenever they come under attack by insurgents opposed to the occupation of Afghanistan. Hekmat Karzai, cousin of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, told the *Times*, “It takes time to figure out that not everyone in a turban is a suicide bomber.”

The *Times* reported, “After a suicide bombing last week on the outskirts of Kabul that targeted a US military convoy and killed two Western security officers, Afghan police anxiously waved journalists away. ‘Don’t go close,’ they warned. ‘The Americans might shoot you.’”

All of these deaths constitute war crimes carried out by the occupying forces. In what is no doubt also an underestimation, the Associated Press reports that 3,100 Afghans have been killed so far this year. This puts casualties on a track to far exceed the number killed last year, estimated at 4,000.



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