

US bombing kills 14 construction workers in Afghanistan

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An air strike by US-led occupation forces in Afghanistan left at least 14 members of a road construction crew dead late Tuesday.

The workers, who were building a road in Nuristan Province, about 110 miles northeast of Kabul, were killed in their sleep as jet fighters and helicopter gunships attacked their camp. The road was being built in the mountainous and strife-torn area under a contract with the US military.

“All of our poor workers have been killed,” Sayed Noorulla Jalili, director of Amerifa, a Kabul-based road construction firm told the media.

One official in the province, which borders Pakistan, said that 25 people had died in the bombing. Taj Mohammad, head of the Nuristan provincial capital, told the French news agency AFP, “We collected their flesh and put it in bags. We handed the remains of the ones we could recognize to their families.”

AFP quoted the head of a hospital in the neighboring province of Nangarhar, where 10 of the bodies were sent, as saying: “Most of them were not recognizable,” with relatives compelled to identify them from clothing or other characteristics.

A spokesman for NATO claimed the occupation forces did not know about the civilian deaths. The US-led forces were “engaged in Nurgaram and Du Ab districts, and in those places we used air strikes against [Taliban],” said the spokesman, Brigadier General Carlos Branco. “The situation is not clear at all at this stage. We are carrying out the investigation and trying to get a clear picture.”

According to an estimate given by the Associated Press based on casualty reports, some 6,000 Afghan civilians have been killed this year. This is an all-time high for civilian deaths since the occupation began six years ago—but undoubtedly an underestimation of the

total death toll. Oxfam, the aid organization, issued a report earlier this month that estimated at least half of the civilian casualties have resulted from US-NATO attacks or actions by their Afghan puppet forces.

Particularly in the more isolated rural provinces, where the Taliban and other resistance forces have made a marked resurgence, the US-led occupation has often relied on the use of indiscriminate air power.

This has also been the deadliest year for occupation troops, with at least 111 US personnel killed thus far in 2007, and 110 from other NATO countries.

The bombing in Nuristan came just a week after the United Nations’ top official on human rights described civilian casualties resulting from military actions by US-led occupation forces as having reached “alarming levels.”

Referring to incidents involving the killing of civilians by US and NATO troops, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said in a statement: “These not only breach international law but are eroding support among the Afghan community for the government and international military presence as well as public support in contributing states for continued engagement in Afghanistan.”

Arbour issued the statement November 21 following a six-day trip to Afghanistan. She also raised concerns that US and other NATO troops are detaining Afghans and then turning them over to Afghan security forces who subject them to torture.

In response to the UN criticism—as well as desperate pleas by the US-installed puppet government of President Hamid Karzai, which fears the mounting popular anger over these killings—NATO commanders had claimed last week that they had changed their tactics to ensure greater protection of civilian lives.

This latest slaughter will undoubtedly further inflame

Afghan resentment of the occupation, which has fueled the growth of the resistance by Taliban and other forces throughout much of southern Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration's National Security Council has issued a report concluding that Washington has failed to achieve its strategic goals in Afghanistan, despite the continuous reports of military actions involving the killing of large numbers of Afghans said to be members of the Taliban.

The *Washington Post* reported Sunday that "Intelligence analysts acknowledged the battlefield victories, but they highlight the Taliban's unchallenged expansion into new territory, an increase in opium poppy cultivation and the weakness of the government of President Hamid Karzai as signs that the war effort is deteriorating."

The paper quoted one senior intelligence official as saying that, while the military had managed to "achieve our objectives and kill bad guys," the forces opposing the occupation "seem to have little trouble finding replacements."

The official added, "There doesn't seem to be a lot of progress being made.... I would think that from [the Taliban] standpoint, things are looking decent."



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