

US/NATO death squads killing indiscriminately in Afghanistan

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The *New York Times* reported this week that the overall commander of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan is seeking to impose tighter control over the activities of special forces units, after recent operations led to more civilian deaths. General Stanley McChrystal's concern is not the deaths, however, but the manner in which they are fuelling Afghan hatred for the US-led occupation and their occasional exposure in the international media.

On March 5, McChrystal publicly released a portion of a directive he had issued—reportedly in late January or early February—which had placed conditions on the night raids that occupation troops regularly conduct on Afghan civilian homes.

McChrystal noted in his release: “Despite their effectiveness and operational value, night raids come at a steep cost in terms of the perceptions of the Afghan people. The myths, distortions and propaganda arising out of night raids often have little to do with the reality—few Afghans have been directly affected by night raids, but nearly every Afghan I talk to mentions them as the single greatest irritant. Night raids must be conducted with even greater care, additional constraints, and standardisation throughout Afghanistan.”

McChrystal's directive stipulated new conditions, including the involvement of Afghan government forces in the raids; treating people with dignity; and informing victims as to how to get compensation for seized or damaged property. The cosmetic character of the order, along with that of an earlier directive calling for caution before launching air strikes, can be judged by the following incidents since early February:

* The London *Times* reported on March 13 that American special forces, accompanied by Afghan police,

entered a housing compound near Gardez, in Paktia province on February 12. They killed a local police commander named Daoud, his brother and three women, two of whom were pregnant. His 15-year-old son was also shot.

According to an unpublished UN report obtained by the *Times*, the occupation forces broke in at 3.30 a.m. while Daoud's extended family was celebrating the naming of a baby. The man who noticed them cried “Taliban”. Daoud and his son were gunned down as they ran into the courtyard to investigate. His brother, who recognised the assailants as Americans, was shot dead as he yelled in English “don't fire, we work for the government”. The three women were killed by either a blast of gunfire that entered the house or, according to witnesses cited in a *New York Times* article, were gunned down as they attempted to help the men.

The UN report stated that the remaining people in the compound were “assaulted by the US and Afghan forces, restrained and forced to stand barefoot for several hours outside in the cold”. Daoud and his 18-year-old niece allegedly died of their wounds due to lack of medical treatment. Eight men were taken away and interrogated for four days before being released.

An initial press release by the US/NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) claimed that the three women had been “tied up, gagged and killed” before the special forces' attack. ISAF later admitted the allegation was false and also that Daoud was not Taliban.

* On February 21, special forces in Uruzgan province called in a helicopter gunship strike on three trucks they were monitoring, killing 27 people. The occupants were all unarmed and all civilians. An anonymous NATO

official told the *New York Times*: “What I saw on that video would not have led me to pull the trigger. It was one of the worst things I’ve seen in a while.” The nationality of the troops has not identified but the Australian Special Air Service (SAS) is the most active special forces unit in Uruzgan province. It has been blamed for a number of atrocities against civilians.

* According to the London *Times*, American and Afghan troops in February raided the home of Rahmatullah Sediqi, a 61-year-old shopkeeper in Ghazni province who had provided shelter to Taliban fighters the night before, reportedly under threat. The Taliban were gone. The occupation forces shot dead his wife and son.

* This month, a helicopter gunship fired a missile into the guest room of a housing compound in Karakhil village in Wardak province, killing three alleged Taliban insurgents. Locals claim that a landing party of occupation troops then entered the home and shot dead its owner, 32-year-old engineer Hamidullah, his wife and his son. Another child was seriously wounded.

The publicity given to McChrystal’s directive by the *New York Times* has all the hallmarks of a public relations exercise, intended to give the appearance that he is “reining in” special forces’ operations to protect civilian lives.

In reality, the entire military strategy of the US occupation force in Afghanistan, drawn up by commanders McChrystal and General David Petraeus, is predicated on the use of what can only be described as death squads to terrorise the Afghan people into submission. Civilians who die in the process are regarded by the Obama White House and the Pentagon as “collateral damage”.

In Iraq, McChrystal served under Petraeus as the head of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) during the so-called “surge” from 2007 to 2008. The surge had two key aspects. Firstly, a concerted effort to bribe a substantial section of the anti-occupation resistance to cease fighting, and secondly, the wholesale use of JSOC-directed units to assassinate or capture insurgents who would not lay down their arms. The Iraqi government estimated that in the first months of 2008 alone, over 3,000 members of the anti-occupation Shiite Mahdi Army militia were killed, mainly by covert operations.

McChrystal was selected by Petraeus—and endorsed by Obama—to head US/NATO forces in Afghanistan because of the so-called success of the operations in Iraq. Under his command, Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan have become free fire kill zones. Jet fighters, gunships and unmanned Predator drones stalk the sky while gangs of heavily-armed and highly-trained special forces scour the ground, seeking to kill or detain anyone perceived to be organising armed resistance. In case after case, the people they slaughter are defenceless men, women and children.

As was revealed this week, a sinister, off-the-books private mercenary operation to help identify increasing numbers of targets for assassination also existed until it was shut down following CIA complaints (see: “US military created private spy and murder squad in Afghanistan”).

Last year, 586 civilian deaths in Afghanistan were officially blamed on the actions of the occupation forces. According to the *New York Times*, Afghan and UN officials believe special forces units were responsible for the majority. The newspaper noted that the UN human rights office report stated last year: “These forces often operate with little or no accountability and exacerbate the anger and resentment felt by communities.”

There is no official body count of how many alleged “Taliban” or insurgents were killed. Their deaths also intensify local hostility toward a murderous foreign occupation force.



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