

Afghans protest over US massacre of civilians

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At least two people were killed Friday when several hundred Afghan villagers clashed with security forces while attempting to march to the eastern city of Jalalabad to protest the latest massacre of civilians by US military forces.

According to local officials, roughly a dozen civilians were killed Thursday night when helicopter-borne US troops assaulted a compound in the Surkh Road District of eastern Nangahar Province.

The demonstrators, numbering over 300, marched on local administrative offices, attempting to enter the district governor's office. Carrying the bodies of four of the raid's victims, the villagers chanted "Death to America," "Death to Karzai" and "Long live the Taliban." They erected barricades of burning tires across the main road and burned an American flag in protest.

Clashes erupted when police tried to turn the demonstrators back from marching on Jalalabad, the provincial capital. According to reports, one demonstrator was shot dead at the scene, and another died at local hospital after being mortally wounded.

According to the CNN news network, Nasrutullah Arsala, head of the Nangahar provincial capital, reported nine civilians killed in the US-led raid.

The Associated Press quoted a local government official, Mohammed Arish, who said that those killed in the raid included a father and his four sons and four members of another family.

"They are farmers," he told the news agency. "They are innocent. They are not insurgents or militants."

Al Jazeera said that witnesses at the scene put the number of civilians killed at between nine and 15.

It marked the second time in little more than three weeks that a night raid by US forces has resulted in civilian casualties in the district, which is about nine miles from Jalalabad.

The first raid, on April 28, was carried out against the home of a local member of the Afghan parliament, Safia Sidiqui, and resulted in the killing of one of her relatives, who reportedly came out of the house with a shotgun, believing it was being entered by thieves.

The *New York Times* interviewed Sidiqui, who traveled to the village and interviewed survivors of Thursday night's raid.

"All of the victims were farmers, who had been working late into the night thrashing wheat," the *Times* reported Sidiqui as saying. She also told the newspaper that the victims included a 12-year-old boy and a 70-year-old man.

The US troops, she said, "just shot them down as they jumped from their beds." Responding to reports that weapons were recovered at the scene, Sidiqui said, "They were two rifles, these are farmers and everyone has rifles. They cannot compete with a hundred Americans with all their modern weapons."

The US military made its standard response to all reports of massacres carried out by its forces, denying any knowledge of civilian casualties and insisting that only "insurgents" had been killed. Repeatedly, these claims have proven false and often part of elaborate attempts to cover up the killings.

The Pentagon and the White House have grown increasingly concerned that the growing number of Afghan civilians killed by US-led forces is only intensifying popular opposition to foreign occupation of Afghanistan and driving a growing number of Afghans to join the armed resistance.

Just last January, the top US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, announced new rules of engagement for night raids, which have been carried out largely by US special operations troops and have produced a major share of civilian deaths. Supposedly, the use of such raids was to be tightly restricted, and they were only to be carried out with

Afghan forces taking the lead in breaking down doors and entering homes.

There is already ample evidence, however, that the raids have increased rather than declined, as the US military carries out targeted assassinations of suspected leaders of the Taliban and other elements resisting occupation. There is also no indication that Afghan forces are playing any major role in these operations.

Similarly, McChrystal responded to growing popular outrage in Afghanistan over the slaughter of civilians in bombings carried out by US warplanes by issuing orders last July that such aerial attacks should be carried out only “under very limited and prescribed conditions.” He added, however, that commanders on the ground would have full discretion in calling in air support to protect their troops.”

According to the *Air Force Times*, however, the number of bombing and strafing runs has decreased only slightly. The latest figures released by the Air Force indicate that US aircraft dropped bombs, fired missiles or strafed Afghans 4184 times in 2009, compared to 5051 times in 2008.

The Pentagon’s own figures indicate that the number of Afghan civilians killed by US forces surged by 76 percent in the first three months of this year compared to the same period in 2009. While the US military’s totals represent a ludicrous cover-up of the real scale of the death toll—90 in the first quarter of 2010, compared to 51 in the same period in 2009—the rate of increase is no less significant

President Barack Obama found himself forced to address the issue of civilian casualties during a joint press conference with Afghanistan’s US-backed puppet president at the White House on Wednesday.

“When there is a civilian casualty, that is not just a political problem for me,” said Obama. “I am ultimately accountable, just as General [Stanley] McChrystal is accountable, for somebody who is not on the battlefield who got killed.”

The US president went on to say that he took “no pleasure in hearing a report that a civilian has been killed. That’s not why I ran for president.”

This will provide cold comfort to the thousands of Afghans who have seen their loved ones slaughtered since Obama came to office in January 2009 and proceeded to escalate the war and increase the level of killing.

The feigned distress about civilian deaths is a reflection of deepening concern within both the political establishment and the military hierarchy over the apparent failure of Obama’s “surge” and the “counterinsurgency strategy” promoted by General McChrystal to produce any gains for the US occupation.

The McClatchy news agency quoted an unnamed US Defense Department official as acknowledging that the US military operation in Marjah, a sparsely populated rural area of Helmand province, “is already coming unraveled.”

The offensive, which involved some 10,000 US troops, was promoted as a crucial test of McChrystal’s strategy for waging counterinsurgency warfare, clearing out resistance and then installing a US-backed administration.

The official recalled that McChrystal had boasted that he had a “government in a box” ready to impose over the people of Marjah.

“But when they opened the box,” he commented, “there was nothing in it.”

The growing number of critics of McChrystal’s strategy within the military command point out that, if the US occupation forces were unable to establish control over a rural district like Marjah with 10,000 troops, his plan to deploy just 20,000 troops for an offensive against Kandahar, Afghanistan’s second-largest city, a Taliban stronghold with a population of nearly half a million, is doomed to failure.

In a television interview Thursday, McChrystal was asked whether the US was winning the war in Afghanistan. “I think I would be prepared to say nobody is winning, at this point,” the general said.



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