

# Another war crime in Afghanistan: US massacres nine children in air strike

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On Tuesday, March 1, the US military massacred nine children in an airstrike in Afghanistan's northeastern Kunar province. The attack, which prompted mass protests, is only the latest atrocity in the region, coming less than two weeks after another attack left as many as 65 civilians dead.

The nine children killed Tuesday were collecting firewood in the Pech Valley area of Afghanistan. They were targeted by helicopter gunships sent from a nearby base run by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). A video report from Al Jazeera shows the burial of the nine children, all under fourteen. NATO forces claimed that they were responding to rocket attacks.

This latest incident is part of a regular campaign of terror directed at the Afghan people. Countless numbers of civilians have been killed. Often there is no direct evidence of these war crimes, with most casualties simply labeled by the US military and an obedient media as "insurgents" or "Taliban."

As video footage of the latest attack emerged, US officials, including President Barack Obama, issued statements apologizing for the incidents. Their comments merely underscored the indifference of the colonial occupiers. General David Petraeus, the ISAF commander, declared, "Regrettably, there appears to have been an error in the hand-off between identifying the location of the insurgents and the attack helicopters that carried out the subsequent operations."

Obama, who has overseen a massive escalation of violence directed at the Afghan and Pakistani people, said in a phone call Thursday to Afghan President Hamid Karzai that he felt "deep regret" over the slaughter. For his part, Karzai expressed concern that the repeated killing of civilians was increasing popular hatred directed at the US occupation, which "will cause

huge problems."

On the day after the attack, March 2, hundreds of protesters gathered in the provincial capital of Assad-Abad. Radio Free Europe reported, "Angry demonstrators...carried photos of children who died in the air strike. They also chanted slogans against the US and Afghan governments."

One demonstrator quoted by Reuters declared, "It is not the first time they have killed our poor and innocent people. We don't accept their apologies. They have apologized in the past but continue killing our people again and again."

On February 17, helicopter strikes in the Ghaziabad district of Kunar province killed 65 civilians, including 40 children under the age of 13, according to an Afghan government investigation released on February 27. Twenty-two women were also among the dead, and dozens more were injured.

As is generally the case, the US responded to the initial claims of casualties in this earlier incident by denying that any civilians were involved. Petraeus went so far as to suggest that area residents had invented stories and injured their own children support these claims.

Only a few days after this slaughter, another airstrike in the Qulgha village in nearby Nangarhar province killed two adults and their four children between the ages of three and eight.

The escalation of violence in the area is likely tied to the plans announced last month for a withdrawal of US forces from the Pech Valley by the end of the year. NATO forces are seeking to do as much damage as possible to the popular resistance before retreating to the major cities. (See "US retreats from strategic Afghanistan valley")

2011 is quickly shaping up to be the bloodiest year in

the Afghan war since its launching by the US more than nine years ago, exceeding the record death toll in 2010. Through a combination of airstrikes, military attacks, and special operations actions, thousands of Afghans were killed last year.

According to Afghan officials, more than 200 civilians were killed in attacks and military operations during the last two weeks of February.



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