

Anti-American rioting sweeps Afghanistan

A reporter
4 April 2011

A series of bloody incidents across Afghanistan demonstrates the weakness and political crisis of the US occupation regime, and refutes the claims by the Obama administration that its escalation of the war against the Taliban and other insurgent forces has produced significant military gains.

Several of the incidents were triggered by the provocative actions of a small Christian fundamentalist group in Florida, which staged a public burning of the Koran last month and posted video of the event on the Internet, including Arabic-language subtitles in an effort to inflame Muslim opinion around the world.

The video has been widely circulated in Afghanistan, and US-backed President Hamid Karzai made a public denunciation of the desecration of the Islamic holy book in a speech Thursday, in which he called for the arrest of the Florida preacher, Terry Jones, who staged the Koran-burning.

After Friday prayer services in Mazar-i-Sharif, the country's third-largest city, several thousand protesters marched on a United Nations compound and overran it, killing four Nepalese guards and three European aid workers inside, one from Sweden, one from Norway and one from Romania. The Russian chief of the office survived only by addressing the attackers in Dari, one of Afghanistan's national languages, and pretending he was a Muslim. Four of the protesters were killed in the fighting as well.

Rioting swept the southern city of Kandahar the following day, with nine people reported killed and 81 injured, all from bullet wounds, according to press reports. Afghan police opened fire on the protesters using live ammunition. The demonstrators chanted against the United States, citing the Koran burning in Florida, and some flew Taliban flags. Most shops and businesses in Afghanistan's second-largest city closed their doors for the day.

The anti-American rioting was especially significant

because it began in Mazar-i-Sharif, a largely Uzbek-populated city where the Taliban is historically weak. The city and its surrounding Balkh province were one of seven areas designated last month for transfer to purely Afghan security control in June, the deadline set by the Obama administration for the beginning of token withdrawals of US military forces.

The explosion in Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, demonstrated how flimsy are the results of the US-NATO offensive in southern Afghanistan, which has focused a year-long effort on securing the main population centers in Kandahar province and neighboring Helmand province.

Also on Saturday, a group of gunmen attacked the gates of Camp Phoenix, a large NATO military base on the outskirts of Kabul, the Afghan capital. NATO officials said that the attackers included at least two suicide bombers disguised in burqas. Three of the attackers were killed, while three soldiers in the NATO International Security Assistance Force suffered minor injuries, a NATO spokesman said.

On Sunday, April 3, the riots against the Koran-burning spread to eastern Afghanistan, with hundreds of protesters blocking a main highway in Jalalabad, burning an effigy of President Obama and calling for the withdrawal of US troops.

Perhaps even more serious, from a military standpoint, was an incident that took place on Thursday, March 31, when a helicopter-borne US attack in Kunar province, in eastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan, ran into heavy fire from Taliban fighters. Six US soldiers were killed, one of the largest death tolls in any military engagement, outside of transport helicopter crashes.

ABC television news correspondent Mike Boettcher, who was embedded with the US military unit, described the firefight as the most intense he has ever witnessed in his three decades as a war correspondent.

The area is remote and mountainous, and has been largely abandoned under the current US military strategy, which is focused on heavy patrols in and around the major population centers and agricultural areas, leaving many mountain valleys largely to the insurgents.

US officials announced a pullback from the Pech Valley in Kunar province beginning February 15, with the area transitioned to exclusively Afghan policing over a two-month period. At the time, the *New York Times* wrote, “Afghan units will remain in the valley, a test of their military readiness.”

Since then, Afghan security forces have largely abandoned the area, deeming the continued staffing of isolated outposts a suicide mission.

In a sign of the crumbling government control in the region, Taliban insurgents seized control of a district capital in Nuristan province, adjoining Kunar, on Tuesday, March 29, driving the governor and local police out of Waygal. The provincial police commander said in statement to the press, “Police forces have tactically withdrawn from the district center early this morning about 5 a.m. following harsh fighting and due to lack of ammunition, and to avoid civilian casualties.”

The continued setbacks for the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan take place amid reports of deepening divisions within the Obama administration and the US military brass over the future course of operations there. The *Washington Post* reported this week that General David Petraeus, the top US commander in Afghanistan, has not even presented a recommendation on how many US troops and which units could be pulled out in June.

The newspaper said that military officials drafting plans for the pullout had prepared three options, two of which involved withdrawing zero combat troops, making a mockery of the administration’s claim that June will mark a turning point in the 10-year-long military occupation.

The *Post* noted that while the US military buildup has been focused on southern Afghanistan, “military officials have grown increasingly concerned about the deteriorating security situation” in the eastern part of the country, which borders on the Pashtun-populated tribal regions of Pakistan.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact