

Twelve children killed in another US massacre in Afghanistan

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American forces in Afghanistan killed twelve children and two women in a night-time bombing of two houses in Nawzad district of Helmand province Saturday. The incident, one of several involving civilian deaths recently, is yet another atrocity committed by the US-NATO forces engaged in the illegal occupation.

According to local Afghan officials, the fourteen civilians died as they slept in two family compounds in a small farming community about 80 kilometres north of Helmand Province's capital, Lashkar Gah. Six others were reported wounded in the airstrike, though differing accounts have emerged of the total number of dead and wounded. President Hamid Karzai's office said that 10 children, two women, and two men were killed, while NATO officials said nine civilians had died.

Family members and neighbours of the victims furiously denounced the operation. One survivor, Noor Agha, told Reuters: "My house was bombarded in the middle of the night and my children were killed ... the Taliban were far away from my home; why was my house bombed?"

A group of villagers travelled to Lashkar Gah with the bodies of eight dead children, some reportedly as young as two years old, to protest outside the governor's mansion. The BBC said that the group chanted: "See, they aren't Taliban."

Prior to the bombing there had been fighting between US forces and local resistance fighters. According to one local elder quoted in Britain's *Telegraph*, "Shots were fired at NATO helicopters, which are believed to

have been American, when they flew into the area." They "returned after 10 to 20 minutes and fired rockets, killing 12 of his relatives."

Major General John Toolan, commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan's southwest region, released a statement yesterday reporting that the airstrike had targeted five insurgents who attacked a US ground patrol and killed a Marine. This points to the likelihood that the subsequent airstrike was an indiscriminate reprisal operation.

Major General Toolan, however, attempted to recycle the US military's well-worn alibi of anti-occupation forces using "civilian shields", saying that the insurgents were firing from inside a compound when the airstrike was called in. "Unfortunately, the compound the insurgents purposefully occupied was later discovered to house innocent civilians," he declared. NATO provided no evidence to substantiate this allegation, nor did it explain how it reached this definitive conclusion within hours of a formal investigation commencing.

Underscoring the occupying forces' utter contempt for the population of Afghanistan, Toolan declared, "While I know there is no price on human life, we will ensure that we make amends with the families in accordance with Afghan culture." For the US military, "making amends" involves handing over a small amount of money to the families of those it murders, at the rate of about \$2,500 per fatality.

The latest massacre of civilians will further inflame the overwhelming opposition in Afghanistan to the US-NATO occupation. Nearly a decade after the initial

invasion, the various pretexts for the occupation have been long exposed. The war has always been driven by US imperialism's attempt to seize control of the strategically crucial and resource rich central Asian state, as part of the wider drive to use military force to maintain its global hegemony. These predatory objectives have determined the colonial character of the fighting in Afghanistan, with one of the central objectives being to terrorise the population into stopping all acts of resistance against the occupation.

The chief US stooge in Kabul, President Hamid Karzai, has been compelled to publicly denounce the escalating violence unleashed since President Barack Obama's "surge." He quickly spoke out in response to the latest killing of civilians, describing it as "the murdering of Afghanistan's children and women." A spokesperson for Karzai added that "on behalf of the Afghan people", he "gives his last warning to the US troops and US officials in this regard."

Just prior to the Helmand airstrike on Saturday night, Karzai issued a statement saying he had ordered his defence ministry to take control of night-time house raids, which were now to be "independently conducted by Afghan troops", not by US-NATO forces. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) immediately dismissed the edict out of hand—making little pretence of acknowledging Karzai's formal status as head of state of a "sovereign" nation. "We know we would not have seen the gains and progress made to date without the conduct of targeted, intelligence-driven night operations," an ISAF spokesman declared.

Karzai's statement was aimed at placating anger following a NATO night raid that killed four members of a family in the country's northern Takhar province two weeks ago, an incident that triggered large protests in which twelve civilians were shot dead and another 85 wounded by Afghan police. (See "Afghans killed in protest over NATO night raids").

Takhar province was previously regarded as among the most secure in Afghanistan. On Saturday, however, the Taliban claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at a provincial governor's office in Takhar's

capital, Taloqan. The attack killed General Mohammed Daoud Daoud, police commander for northern Afghanistan. Daud was a former commander with the brutal Northern Alliance militia, which worked alongside the US military during the 2001 invasion. Two other Afghan police were killed, together with two German soldiers. Among the survivors was the commander of NATO forces for northern Afghanistan, Germany's General Markus Kneip, who reportedly suffered minor injuries.

The Taliban operation again demonstrated the vulnerability of the occupying powers' proxy forces. The anti-occupation fighters clearly had advance knowledge of the high-level meeting, and were able to breach security with a suicide bomber deployed while dressed in a police uniform.

An investigation meanwhile continues into another alleged massacre of Afghan civilians by NATO forces. The governor of north-eastern Nuristan province, Jamaluddin Badr, yesterday told Agence France Presse that 18 civilians and 20 police had been killed in a so-called friendly fire US air strike last Wednesday.

After fierce fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces, the Taliban fighters reportedly withdrew from an area they had captured. Local civilians were later killed by US rockets after they re-emerged from their homes. Police, who had returned to their buildings but in civilian clothes, were also targeted. ISAF spokesman Major Tim James said a fact-finding team had been sent to probe the allegations, but insisted, "Our initial reporting does not indicate civilian casualties in that air strike."



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