NATO bombing kills eight Afghan children

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At least eight Afghan civilians, all children according to some reports, were killed Thursday when a NATO warplane bombed a village in Afghanistan's northeast Kapisa province.

The deaths drew a formal protest Friday from Afghanistan's US-backed president, Hamid Karzai. A statement from the presidential palace in Kabul said that Karzai had formed an investigatory commission headed by his adviser, Mohammad Zahir Sapi, and including several members of parliament and representatives of Afghan ministries, to conduct “an all-out probe of the NATO bombing.”

"Based on information by (the) provincial governor, as a result of an air strike conducted on February 8, eight children were killed," the statement said.

A NATO spokesman said the US-led occupation command could “confirm that there has been a situation” and that it was dispatching a “joint assessment team” to the area.

The district police chief in the area, Abdul Hamid Erkin, told the AFP news agency that the attack took place in the village of Geyawa in the Nejrab district. He said it began with a night raid by special forces troops on a home in the village, and the next morning the warplanes struck.

According to his account, seven children and one 20-year-old mentally handicapped adult were the victims of the bombing. He said that French troops operating in the area had “claimed that the target was a group of Taliban facilitators,” but that his own investigation indicated that there were no Taliban in the area.

The French military, which has deployed some 3,000 troops in Afghanistan, has been in charge of operations in Kapisa province. South of Kabul, the province has long held strongholds of anti-occupation forces, including both Taliban and forces loyal to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the mujaheddin commander who was a major recipient of US funding during the CIA-backed war against the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

It was in Kapisa that an Afghan Army soldier gunned down four French soldiers last month, leading President Nicolas Sarkozy to announce that France would pull all of its combat forces out of Afghanistan by the end of 2013 and turn over responsibility for security in the province to Afghan forces next month.

The Karzai regime has repeatedly warned its US and NATO patrons that the combination of special forces night raids on Afghan homes and the bombing deaths of civilians has played a major role in generating popular support for the armed groups resisting the US-led occupation.

More than 3,000 Afghan civilians were killed in the Afghan war in 2011, according to the United Nations. Undoubtedly this is a major underestimation of the real toll, as the UN has routinely accepted NATO reports describing civilian victims as “insurgents” or “militants.”

While the Obama administration has vowed to pull out another 22,000 US troops by September—leaving 68,000 American soldiers and Marines in the country—and to remove all combat troops by the end of 2014, there is no indication that these kinds of operations will be brought to a halt. On the contrary, administration and military officials are indicating that the US bid to conquer Afghanistan will rely ever more heavily on special operations troops, CIA paramilitaries and air power.

The senior commander of US special operations forces announced at a conference in Washington on Tuesday that his command would be given overall leadership of the US intervention in Afghanistan. “I have no doubt that special operations will be the last to leave Afghanistan,” said Adm. Bill McRaven. “As far as anything beyond that, we're exploring a lot of options.”

McRaven told his audience at the meeting of the National Defense Industrial Association that some 9,000 special operations troops deployed in Afghanistan would work by this summer to integrate their hunter-killer squads with training missions and joint operations with Afghan forces.

The *Washington Post*, meanwhile, reported that the CIA “is expected to have a more aggressively operational role” in Afghanistan as regular Army and Marine units

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are drawn down.

CIA paramilitaries would be used as "tools for keeping the Taliban off balance, protecting the government in Kabul and preserving access to Afghan airstrips that enable armed CIA drones to hunt al-Qaeda remnants," the *Post* said, citing agency sources. It added that the CIA station in the country, the largest in the world with as many as 1,000 employees, "is expected to expand in collaboration with Special Operations forces when the drawdown of conventional troops begins."

The deteriorating morale of US forces assigned to Afghanistan has found fresh expression with the publication of photographs showing ten members of a Marine Corps unit posing in front of a flag bearing the insignia of the SS, the Nazi terror unit responsible for many of the worst atrocities of the German Third Reich.

While the photo was taken in Sangin, Afghanistan in 2010, there are indications that the insignia had been in use for several years. The Marines involved were members of a Scout Sniper unit attached to the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

A spokesman for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force acknowledged that "Some Scout Snipers have unfortunately used the 'SS runes' as a symbol for their elite organization," but insisted that the symbol, routinely used by white supremacist and fascist organizations, had no "racial connotations." None of the Marines involved were punished.

The photographs surfaced barely a month after a video showing US Marines urinating on the corpses of slain Afghan resistance fighters provoked outrage in Afghanistan.

Such incidents reflect the overall demoralization of the US occupation forces under conditions in which 10 years of warfare have failed to achieve US objectives. An indication of the real state of affairs was provided by an article published in the *Armed Forces Journal* entitled "Truth, Lies and Afghanistan".

The author is Lt. Col. Daniel L. Davis, an active duty officer with 27 years in the Army, who recently completed his second tour in Afghanistan. Having traveled through at least a dozen provinces and spoken to both US military personnel and Afghan soldiers and officials, Davis writes: "What I saw bore no resemblance to rosy official statements by US military leaders about conditions on the ground."

He continues: "I saw the incredible difficulties any military force would have to pacify even a single area of any of those provinces; I heard many stories of how insurgents controlled virtually every piece of land beyond eyeshot of a US or International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) base.

"I saw little to no evidence the local governments were able to provide for the basic needs of the people. Some of the Afghan civilians I talked with said the people didn't want to be connected to a predatory or incapable local government.

"From time to time, I observed Afghan Security forces collude with the insurgency."

Davis quoted a senior enlisted officer as telling him: "Guys are saying, 'I hope I live so I can at least get home to R&R leave before I get it,' or 'I hope I only lose a foot.' Sometimes they even say which limb it might be: 'Maybe it'll only be my left foot.' They don't have a lot of confidence that the leadership two levels up really understands what they're living here, what the situation really is."

The Lieutenant Colonel concluded: "How many more men must die in support of a mission that is not succeeding and behind an array of more than seven years of optimistic statements by US senior leaders in Afghanistan? No one expects our leaders to always have a successful plan. But we do expect—and the men who do the living, fighting and dying deserve—to have our leaders tell us the truth about what's going on."

In another grim indication of the cost of the Afghanistan war, the military-oriented newspaper *Stars and Stripes* reported that a record number of US troops lost their arms and legs in 2011, with the number of amputations surpassing those performed even during the heaviest fighting of the Iraq "surge."

Two hundred and forty military personnel had at least one arm or leg amputated, almost all of them as result of wounds suffered in combat in Afghanistan. Marines suffered the worst toll, with 129 undergoing amputations, while 100 Army soldiers suffered loss of their limbs and six sailors and five airmen.

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