

# NATO air strike kills Afghan family of eight

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In the latest of an apparently endless string of atrocities in occupied Afghanistan, a NATO air strike wiped out an entire Afghan family—father, mother and six children—according to Afghan officials in Paktia province, near the country’s eastern border with Pakistan.

The air strike took place in the village of Sar Khilo in Gerda Serai district of Paktia about 8 p.m. local time Saturday night, according to Rohullah Samon, a spokesman for the provincial governor. Referring to the NATO International Security Assistance Force by its initials, Samon said, “The strike by ISAF killed four teenage boys, two teenage girls, and two women, and wounded two others.”

The spokesman identified the father as Mohammed Shafi, but did not supply the names of the other seven victims. “Shafi was not a Taliban,” Samon declared. “He was not in any opposition group against the government. He was a villager.”

US and NATO military officials, as they usually do, issued an initial denial that any civilians were killed in Paktia Saturday. A later statement from US Army Lt. Col. Jimmie Cummings was more cautious. “We acknowledge that coalition forces were conducting an operation in Paktia province against a large number of insurgents last night,” he said, “and we also are aware of the media reports today of civilian casualty allegations in that area.”

Another ISAF spokesman, Justin Brockhoff, confirmed that an ISAF ground operation had been conducted Saturday in Paktia province. “According to our initial operation reports, Afghan and ISAF troops were attacked by a large group of insurgents in southern Paktia,” he said. “The troops responded to the

attack by returning fire, and requested close air support.”

Both NATO and the Karzai government claimed they were investigating the incident. Afghan officials said the air strike had not been coordinated with Afghan forces. There was no explanation of the discrepancy between this account and the claim by US-NATO spokesman that Afghan government troops had been involved in the Paktia operation.

The apparent atrocity is the latest in a series of such incidents, mainly in eastern Afghanistan, the current focus of the most intense fighting between the US-NATO occupation forces and multiple insurgent groups, including but not limited to those affiliated with the Taliban.

It is the first such purported “mistake” since the signing of an agreement between US President Obama and Karzai May 1 that supposedly provided for Afghan oversight and control of night raids and other US operations that have frequently resulted in civilian casualties.

At least four NATO troops were killed Saturday in three separate roadside bomb attacks in southern Afghanistan, two in one blast and one each in two others. A NATO spokesman indicated that the explosions were not coordinated. One of the soldiers killed was reportedly British, but the nationality of the other three has not yet been made public.

A week after the NATO summit in Afghanistan, which confirmed the deep divisions among the imperialist powers over how to continue the war and sustain the puppet regime of Karzai, the conflicts were demonstrated publicly in the visit by newly elected

French president Francois Hollande to the war-torn country.

Hollande, elected May 6, made his first international appearance at the NATO summit, where he waffled on his election pledge to withdraw all French troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year. Under pressure from the Obama administration, Hollande limited the withdrawal to combat troops, while pledging that other forces would stay on to train Afghan soldiers.

The French president made an unannounced visit to Kabul Friday for talks with Karzai and then to address French troops in Kapisa province. He was accompanied by newly appointed defense minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and foreign minister Laurent Fabius. France has 3,300 troops, the fourth-largest contingent among the imperialist powers.

Under the revised program of withdrawals confirmed by French officials, some 2,000 combat troops will leave by December 31, while troops engaged in training, logistics, and protection of French-run hospitals and other installations will remain.

The fault lines over Afghanistan policy run not only between rival powers, but within the dominant power in the occupation, the United States. Two top congressional leaders, Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein and Republican Congressman Mike Rogers, chairs of the Senate and House intelligence committees, respectively, have publicly disputed claims of progress in Afghanistan by the White House and Pentagon, with Feinstein declaring after a recent visit, "I think we'd both say that what we found is that the Taliban is getting stronger."

Defense secretary Leon Panetta, appearing Sunday on the ABC television interview program "This Week," disputed this pessimistic assessment, claiming, "The Taliban, my view is that they have been weakened. We have not seen them able to conduct any kind of organized attack to regain any territory that they've lost."

Panetta conceded that there would continue to be bloody combat in Afghanistan, despite the claim by

Obama last week that the war was effectively over. "We still have a fight on our hands," he said. "The American people need to know that. The world needs to know that we still have a fight on our hands."

In a further sign of crisis in the occupation regime, US ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker will quit his position in Kabul this summer, barely a year after he came out of retirement to take the appointment from Obama. No replacement has yet been named.



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