

NATO bombing kills nine women in Afghanistan as fighting mounts

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In the latest atrocity carried out by US-led occupation forces in Afghanistan, an air strike killed nine young women shortly before dawn Sunday morning in Laghman Province's Alingar district, near the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The women, aged 18 to 25, were reportedly gathering firewood in a mountainous area NATO forces claimed was being used by insurgents as a base for attacks on Kabul. Laghman provincial officials said that seven more women and girls had also been wounded in the attack, including some as young as 10 years old.

Mourning villagers carried the dead women to the provincial capital, Mihtarlam, in protest. They showed the corpses wrapped in blankets to journalists and lay them down outside the Laghman governor's residence, demanding an investigation of the massacre and the trial of those responsible.

Commenting on the attack, Alingar District Governor Alif Shah said: "We strongly condemn it—killing innocent women is not justifiable at all. The operation was not coordinated with the Afghan authorities."

After initially denying reports of civilian casualties and claiming that the strike had destroyed a group of 45 insurgents, the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) released a statement declaring that "ISAF takes full responsibility for this tragedy." It extended its "regrets and sympathies" to "civilians who died or were injured" in the ISAF attack.

ISAF spokesman US Air Force Captain Dan Einert said that ISAF is investigating the attack. The US-backed regime of Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced that it would launch its own investigation.

The Alingar district bombing is yet another devastating indictment of the war in Afghanistan, as US and allied forces indiscriminately use heavy weapons to crush widespread popular opposition to the occupation.

NATO forces are escalating the violence, trying to drown armed resistance in blood before the draw-down of NATO forces planned for 2014, due to popular opposition to the war at home in North America and Europe.

The bombing also puts paid to claims by NATO and the US puppet regime in Afghanistan that the occupation forces are trying to minimize civilian casualties.

In June, Pentagon officials tried to stem rising popular anger with the occupation by claiming that they would bomb Afghan civilian homes only in "self-defense." The Afghan government had pressed NATO forces to cease bombing civilian homes after a June 6 air strike in Baraki Barak killed 18 Afghan civilians at a wedding party.

Yesterday's massacre of innocent women and children will intensify opposition to NATO forces. Afghanistan was also hit by protests against US forces after the posting of an anti-Islamic video mocking the Prophet Mohammed that was made in southern California, part of a wave of protests throughout the Muslim world. Hundreds of students shut down Kabul University in protests yesterday, with smaller demonstrations reported in the western city of Herat.

The ISAF is already reeling under a wave of so-called "green-on-blue" shootings of NATO troops by NATO-trained Afghan forces in the aftermath of a devastating Taliban raid on the ISAF base at Camp Bastion.

Six US and British troops were killed over the weekend in "green-on-blue" shootings in southern Afghanistan's Zabul and Helmand provinces. In Zabul province, four US troops were killed and two wounded at a checkpoint, apparently by Afghan National Police (ANP) forces manning the checkpoint with them. Besides one ANP officer found dead at the scene, the

remaining ANP officers fled before more US troops arrived.

On Saturday, two British soldiers were shot and killed by an Afghan policeman when returning from a patrol in Helmand province, a center of the Taliban-led insurgency.

The “green-on-blue” killings have sharply highlighted hostility to the occupation among the Afghan security forces that would be left in charge by a US-NATO withdrawal. In a move that exposes the hollowness of the Obama administration’s 2014 deadline for withdrawal from Afghanistan, US military officials are already planning to keep troops in Afghanistan into 2015.

Aboard a US military plane flying to Turkey, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey discussed the “green-on-blue” shootings with journalists yesterday: “You can’t whitewash it. We can’t convince ourselves that we just have to work harder to get through it. Something has to change.”

The American Forces Press Service reported that after talks with ISAF commander Marine General John Allen, Dempsey would “make plans to get from 68,000 US forces to the number needed on January 1, 2015.”

Dempsey said, “Sometime by the end of the year, I would expect, we would begin to have an idea of what our post-2014 presence will be.”

The raid mounted Friday night on the British and American base at Camp Bastion in Helmand province exposed the increasingly vulnerable posture of NATO forces in Afghanistan. The attack killed two ISAF forces, wounded nine, and caused extensive damage to aircraft and the airfield. Fourteen of the fifteen attackers were killed and the survivor was captured.

An ISAF press dispatch reported: “The attack began just after 10 p.m., when approximately 15 insurgents executed a well-coordinated attack against the airfield on Camp Bastion. The insurgents, organized into three teams, penetrated at one point of the perimeter fence. ... Dressed in US Army uniforms and armed with automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launches and suicide vests, the insurgents attacked Coalition fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft parked on the flight line, aircraft hangars, and other buildings.

“Six Coalition AV-8B Harrier jets were destroyed and two were significantly damaged. Three Coalition

refueling stations were also destroyed. Six soft-skin aircraft hangars were damaged to some degree.”

Camp Bastion, a heavily guarded 20-square-mile compound housing 28,000 troops, is considered so secure that the British royal family chose to send Prince Harry there for military service. The British Ministry of Defense “categorically” rejected reports that the Prince was only a few hundred yards away from the gun battle, according to CNN.

The insurgents’ ability to pull off the operation “sent a shock wave through NATO’s high command,” *Daily Telegraph* defense correspondent Sean Rayment commented. “It was a suicide mission designed to demonstrate that the Taliban can attack any NATO installation, no matter how secure.”

Rayment detailed some of the base’s security features: “The entire location is ringed by multiple 30-foot-high steel fences, topped by triple concertina barbed wire, with an inner 30-ft blast wall which encompasses most of the inner camp. Ground sensors, infrared and thermal imaging cameras, motion detectors and a specially-designed radar can supposedly detect human or aircraft movements from 20 miles away.”

Military investigators are apparently considering the possibility that Afghan maintenance workers at the base passed information about a blind spot in its defenses to the attackers.



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