

NATO strike kills 10 Afghan children after week of bloody fighting

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8 April 2013

A NATO airstrike killed 20 people in eastern Afghanistan during the weekend, including at least one woman and 10 children ages 1 to 12. The attacks came at the end of one of the bloodiest weeks of the entire US occupation, which began in 2001.

The airstrikes were apparently part of an operation targeting Taliban leaders in the Shigel district of Kunar province. When US ground forces encountered resistance, they called for International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) air support. At least two Taliban militants were allegedly killed in the fighting.

In response to an attack in February of 2013 which killed 10 civilians, Karzai prohibited Afghan forces from calling in airstrikes in residential areas and publicly criticized the slaughter of civilians by the US and NATO. Nevertheless, US forces continue to murder innocent Afghan civilians.

“Government officials might tell you that Afghan and foreign forces only have the right to use airstrikes in unpopulated areas, but in practice it is different,” said Afghan General Amrullah Aman. “Americans will use their air support whenever they need it, no matter where it is and no matter how many presidential decrees are issued.”

Last Wednesday, another NATO airstrike in Ghazni, near DehYak district claimed the lives of four Afghan police officers. A helicopter attack in Ghazni, also last week, killed two children. At least seven civilians were killed in another attack last week in Logar province.

Last Wednesday, in the highest death toll attack since 2011, Taliban fighters stormed a courthouse in Farah, killing 46 as they sought to free insurgents standing trial. Last year, the Taliban initiated their spring offensive in May, with a series of bloody actions. With the Afghan winter coming to an end, fighting season is set to begin.

While the US claims that civilian deaths are unavoidable “collateral damage” in a necessary fight against the Taliban, it is simultaneously pushing Karzai to reach a negotiated settlement with elements of the Taliban leadership. The US is continuing to conduct operations against the Taliban as part of this effort, pressuring the leadership to accept a power-sharing arrangement with Karzai and eliminating elements that are implacably opposed to such an outcome.

“On the one hand the Taliban are talking with the Americans, but on the other hand they carry out a bombing in Kabul,” Karzai said early in March, as he asserted that US killings of civilians were destabilizing Afghanistan.

The *Miami Herald* reported on Sunday that Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged that he and other US leaders are convinced that ultimately the Karzai regime must “reach some sort of political accommodation with the insurgents.”

That is, the killing of Afghan civilians by NATO forces is part of an effort to integrate the Taliban into the Karzai regime on terms favorable to US imperialism. The US hopes that such an arrangement will stabilize the country as it redeploys the occupation forces to other war-theaters.

The presence of almost 100,000 international troops on Afghan soil, which includes 66,000 from the United States, is set to be reduced to 32,000 in 2014.

Also on Sunday, a suicide car bomb struck a NATO convoy, killing five Americans, including a 25 year old State Department employee, Anne Smedinghoff.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry lamented the “harsh contradiction” between the allegedly humanitarian purpose of Smedinghoff’s presence in Afghanistan (bringing books to a school) and her death,

calling it a “grim reminder” of the dangers of “foreign service.”

In fact, the killing is a grim reminder of the implications of Washington’s decision to put young Americans—both soldiers and civilians—in harm’s way by violently occupying Afghanistan and routinely killing its inhabitants.

An Afghan villager offered his perspective on the matter. “These foreigners started the problem,” he said, referring to NATO forces. “They have their own country. They should leave.”

In another development, the US Air Force just announced that it will no longer post information about drone strikes in its monthly “air power summary.” Drone strikes now account for one-in-four air attacks launched by US forces in Afghanistan, increasing from one-in-twenty in 2011. Until October 2012, all statistics on drone use were classified.

A UN study from 2012 determined that in 2011 more Afghan civilians were killed than during the previous year of the occupation. Between 2011 and 2012, the number of drone strikes in Afghanistan increased from 294 to 506.

“They are evil things that fly so high you don’t see them but all the time you hear them,” one Afghan villager related to the Associated Press. “Night and day we hear this sound and then the bombardment starts.”



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