

Four Afghan children killed in US raid

By Bill Van Auken
24 October 2012

The killing of four children in a US raid and the disappearance and murder of civilians at the hands of occupation troops have provoked growing anger and protests among the people of Afghanistan.

With the US-led war now in its twelfth year, violence against the country's population continues to mount. The latest incidents were confirmed by the office of Afghanistan's puppet president, Hamid Karzai, on Tuesday. The worst of them took place on Sunday in the eastern province of Logar, just south of Kabul.

Citing a report from the provincial governor, Mohammad Iqbal Azizi, a statement from Karzai's office recounted: "NATO forces carried out an operation on Sunday afternoon to detain two armed militants, but resulted in killing four innocent children who were just grazing animals."

NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) acknowledged Tuesday that civilians may have been killed in the raid. Gen. John Allen, the top US commander in Afghanistan, offered "condolences to the families" and said officers would be sent out to "offer a condolence payment and express our deep regret."

The slaughter of the children in Logar comes just one week after ISAF issued a formal apology for the killing of three other children in an air strike conducted in southern Helmand province's Nawa district. A teenage girl and two young boys were killed in the October 14 strike, which the occupation command claimed had been directed against "insurgents" planting improvised explosive devices (IED). Witnesses, however, said that only the bodies of the children, who had been collecting firewood, were found at the scene.

According to estimates by the United Nations, the war in Afghanistan killed or wounded more than 578 children in the first six months of 2012. A UN report issued in August found that during the first half of this year, two-thirds of the victims of US and NATO air

strikes in Afghanistan were women and children.

In his debate with Republican challenger Mitt Romney Monday night, President Barack Obama spoke of the US intervention as a "nation-building experiment." In fact, the war has left the country devastated, exacting its greatest toll upon Afghanistan's children.

While Washington has poured hundreds of billions of dollars into the country since the 2001 invasion, Afghanistan still has the world's highest infant mortality rate, with one out of four children dying before reaching the age of five.

In his statement Tuesday, Karzai declared, "Despite repeated pledges by NATO to avoid civilian casualties, innocent lives, including children, are still being lost."

The second incident condemned by Karzai was a joint military operation carried out by US troops and Afghan puppet forces in southern Zabul province, near the Pakistan border, on October 13. In the midnight raid, four civilians were taken away, according to the Afghan president's statement, and three of them have since disappeared.

Nearly 1,000 people demonstrated Monday in Qalat, the capital of Zabul province, blocking the Kandahar-Kabul highway to protest against the operation and continuing US-led night raids. These raids, which, after air strikes, are the leading cause of civilian casualties inflicted by occupation forces, are deeply unpopular in Afghanistan.

According to *Pajhwok Afghan News*, the demonstration in Qalat was sparked by a more recent raid in which two tailors were arrested. It quoted one of the organizers of the protest, Abdul Qadir Qalatwal, a member of the local parliament, as saying that the "beheaded bodies of the tailors were dumped in a desert before being blown up."

The news agency reported that the Zabul governor's office had confirmed the deaths of the two men and

“had sought clarity from the NATO-led force.”

ISAF confirmed that civilians had been detained in both raids, but claimed that in the October 13 incident they had been released, while in the October 20 operation, they had been “turned over to Afghan police.”

The obvious question raised by the two incidents is whether US forces are detaining individuals suspected of supporting the resistance to foreign occupation and then turning them over to an Afghan death squad for elimination.

In their debate Monday night, both Obama and Romney insisted that the “surge” that tripled the number of US troops deployed in Afghanistan under Obama was a success, and that a “transition” to Afghan responsibility for security in the country would be completed in December 2014, with US troops coming home.

Both men know that this is a lie. Obama administration officials are currently negotiating the terms of a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the Karzai regime that would see an estimated 25,000 US troops, largely Green Berets and other Special Operations units, stay behind for another decade or more.

Both parties are committed to pursuing the aims that drove the invasion to begin with, along with the subsequent war in Iraq: the use of military force to assert US hegemony over the strategic energy reserves of the Caspian Basin and the Persian Gulf.

Meanwhile, the rosy projections about the readiness of the Afghan troops and police to assume responsibility for security continue to be denied by those most involved in training them.

Quoting US military officers and officials, the *Washington Post* reported Saturday that claims Afghanistan’s 352,000-strong security forces are prepared to take over from the US-led occupation are patently false. According to the *Post*: “No Afghan army battalion is capable of operating without US advisers. Many policemen spend more time shaking down people for bribes than patrolling. Front-line units often do not receive the fuel, food and spare parts they need to function. Intelligence, aviation and medical services remain embryonic. And perhaps most alarming, an increasing number of Afghan soldiers and policemen are turning their weapons on their US and

NATO partners.”

The article, based on interviews with a dozen active-duty officers involved in the training of Afghan forces, makes it clear that in the rush to build the number of Afghan troops and police up to 352,000, Washington has failed to provide adequate training or sufficiently vet the security forces for sympathizers of the Taliban and other armed opposition groups.

“The army is so hollow that some of those units are just going to collapse,” a Special Forces major involved in the training program told the *Post*.

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