

US drone massacre in Afghanistan

By Jacob Crosse
21 September 2019

A US drone attack Wednesday evening in Nangarhar province near the Pakistan border hit farm workers resting after a day's labor, killing at least 30 people and injuring 40 more, all civilians. Many more are reported missing. Unverified reports say the number of dead is significantly higher.

The bloody attack has all the earmarks of a deliberate massacre.

At a joint press conference Friday with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Trump made no mention of the drone atrocity and was not asked about it by reporters. However, he took the occasion to reiterate his previous threat to kill millions of Afghans, saying he could easily “win” the war that way.

After initially denying involvement, US military officials on Thursday confirmed that the drone attack was carried out by US forces, not Afghan troops as originally reported.

The US carried out the attack on the workers despite the fact that village elders had sent a letter to the Nangarhar provincial governor, Shah Mahmood Miakhel, on September 7, explaining that approximately 200 workers would be in the region on September 18, the day of the attack, picking and shelling pine nuts.

According to Reuters, over 150 workers were sleeping in tents when at least one US Predator drone fired an AGM-114 (Hellfire) missile on their encampment.

Amongst the sleeping group were day laborers, farmers and children from local villages looking to earn some money picking pine nuts. After spending all day in the heavily forested mountains harvesting the dry fruit, the tired group lit several bonfires and pitched five large tents to bed down for the evening.

Malik Rahat Gul, a town elder from the region, told Reuters over the phone that the exhausted workers were either sitting or lying down at the time of the

attack. Despite no visible signs of terrorist activity, Gul said it was clear that the drone had “targeted them.”

On Thursday, a spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan, Colonel Sonny Leggett, sought to justify the wanton murder of civilians by stating that the operation was meant to kill “Da’esh terrorists in Nangarhar.” He then sought to pin the blame for the mass killing on the Taliban and ISIS, saying they had a history of “hiding behind civilians” and frequently used “dishonest claims of noncombatant casualties as propaganda weapons.”

Leggett did not acknowledge the scale of the massacre, admitting only that there were reports of “collateral damage,” which the US command was investigating.

This drone strike took place in a region near the Tora Bora mountains that remains largely outside the control of the US puppet government in Kabul. US-led forces stepped up action in the region in recent weeks while peace talks were underway between Washington and the Taliban. Trump broke off the talks earlier this month, using as a pretext a Taliban attack that killed 12 people, including one US soldier. Trump declared at the time that he could not negotiate with people who could commit such an “atrocity.”

Since then, Washington has stepped up its bombing and killing in the region.

Nangarhar province is where the Trump administration carried out a Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) in 2017. It had the most reported civilian casualties of any province in Afghanistan during 2018, according to the United Nations, with 681 deaths recorded. The second most civilian deaths that year were recorded in adjoining Kabul province, directly to the west of Nangarhar, with 596 deaths reported.

Commondreams.org on Thursday cited journalist Emran Feroz, who traveled to Nangarhar province in

2017, as saying he believed the number of civilians killed in the latest US massacre to be much higher than reported. He said, “Seems that recent drone strikes in Nangahar’s Khogyani district ended in a total massacre killing far more than 30 civilians. When I visited Khogyani in 2017, locals told us that drone strikes against farmers and other civilians are taking place regularly.”

Survivors confirmed that several children were among the dead. Malak Khaiyali Khan, a local chief in the area, had sent his young teenaged son along with three of his friends to join in on the harvest. On Thursday morning, US forces returned to Khan his son’s corpse along with those of his friends. Khan, along with eleven other mourning families, journeyed to the provincial capital Jalalabad to protest the murder of his child.

Before burying his son, Khan addressed the crowd of protestors, denouncing the US and wondering out loud, “How can they do this?”

In the 18 years of the US occupation of Afghanistan, the constant presence of drones raining down death has scarred an entire generation. Civilians frequently wait for cloudy days to go outside, knowing it less likely US drones will be circling overhead.

Over 16,000 US soldiers are still deployed throughout the country, along with a network of CIA-trained assassination squads and terrorists. A recent UN report states that nearly 4,000 civilians were killed in the first half of 2019. This year, for the first time, the UN has acknowledged that more civilian deaths have come at the hands of US-led forces than from Taliban actions. Of the nearly 4,000 civilians killed, according to the UN, American and Afghan government air strikes are responsible for 363 deaths, including 150 children, with an additional 156 civilians injured. These figures undoubtedly underestimate the real scale of the carnage.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>