

US bombings kills dozens of Afghan civilians

Bill Van Auken
8 May 2012

US bombardments claimed the lives of dozens of Afghan civilians over the weekend, including women and children, prompting a formal protest from Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai Monday, warning that such actions would render the pact he signed last week with US President Barack Obama "meaningless".

US and NATO spokesmen acknowledged Monday the accuracy of a report from Afghan officials in southern Helmand province that a US helicopter had dropped bombs on a house in the Fatih Mohammad Pech area of Sangin district, killing a mother and her five children, three girls and two boys.

Helmand's Governor Gulab Mangel denounced the Friday night attack, which was ostensibly aimed at a suspected "hideout" for forces resisting the US-led occupation, and demanded an investigation, the Pajhwok Afghan News (PAN) agency reported.

Meanwhile, in Badghis province in Afghanistan's northwest, a US airstrike destroyed homes in the village of Nawboor, killing 15 civilians, including women and children, the district's provincial member of parliament told the AFP news agency.

The mass civilian casualties were reportedly inflicted during a hunt by occupation forces for a Taliban commander, Mullah Abdullah Soori, who had been reported taking refuge in the village.

"The helicopters of foreign forces smashed two houses in the villages," a resident told PAN.

Civilian casualties were also reported in bombings conducted in Logar and Kapisa provinces, east of Kabul.

"In bombardments carried out by coalition forces in Logar, Kapisa, Helmand and Badghis provinces since Saturday [May 5] dozens of our innocent fellow countrymen, including women and children, lost their lives and have been martyred," a statement from Karzai's office read.

The statement said that Karzai had summoned the senior US military commander, Gen. John Allen, and the US Ambassador Ryan Crocker to the presidential palace for an "extraordinary meeting" late Monday.

The statement quoted Karzai as saying that he had "signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement with the US to prevent such incidents from taking place again and safeguard lives of Afghans." He added that "if the lives of Afghans are not safe then the strategic partnership loses its meaning and concept."

In reality, the "Enduring Strategic Partnership" pact signed by Obama and Karzai in Kabul on May 2 set the framework for an open-ended occupation of the country by thousands of US troops, including special operations units that would conduct precisely the kind of murderous raids that took place over the weekend, as well as units assigned to train and "advise" the Afghan puppet security forces.

The agreement, dictated to the Karzai regime by Washington, provides for another decade of US military presence in the country after 2014, the formal deadline for the withdrawal of US-NATO combat forces from Afghanistan. Karzai is conscious that his regime would not last a week without foreign troops, but at the same time recognizes that the killing of civilians has steadily increased the strength of the resistance.

Under the cover of "counter-terrorism" operations, Washington is determined to continue seeking the original strategic aim of the more than decade-old Afghanistan war, which is the securing of a US beachhead in the energy rich-region of Central Asia. This will inevitably involve continued atrocities.

The reports of civilian casualties from the weekend only underscore the beleaguered character of the US occupation. Sangin, where the woman and her five children were reported killed, was the epicenter in 2010 of the Obama administration's military "surge".

The area, a stronghold of the Taliban, was first occupied by British forces, which suffered approximately one third of all their fatalities in the district. It was then flooded with US Marines, who suffered some of the worst casualties of the war there, in what was billed as a campaign to “clear, hold and build.” The ongoing fighting indicates that these objectives were never met.

Badghis, on the country’s northwestern border with Turkmenistan, was the last province to be conquered by the Taliban before it was overthrown in the 2001 US invasion. Like much of the rest of the country, it was previously considered safe by the occupation, but is now a combat zone.

In another indication of the crisis confronting the occupation, the *Wall Street Journal* reports that Washington has been compelled to shelve plans to open a consulate in the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif, which had previously been seen as vital to the goal of establishing a long-term American presence in the country.

As the *Journal* explains, “But the security situation in northern Afghanistan, once considered one of the more peaceful areas of the country, has since become precarious. Last spring, protests over the burning of a Quran by a US pastor led to the storming of a UN compound in Mazar-e Sharif, with mobs killing seven foreigners.”

In his speech last week announcing the pact he signed with Karzai, Obama proclaimed that “the tide has turned” and bragged that “We broke the Taliban’s momentum.”

In statements Sunday, however, the Democratic chair of the Senate intelligence committee and the Republican chair of the House intelligence committee appeared together in a television news program directly contradicting this assessment.

The two, who had recently visited Afghanistan, flatly denied Obama’s claims of success for his “surge”. “I think we’d both say that what we found is the Taliban is stronger,” said Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, the head of the Senate panel, using the label of Taliban to refer to the wide spectrum of armed resistance to the US-led occupation. “The Taliban has a shadow system of governors in many provinces. They’ve gone up north. They’ve gone to the east. Attacks are up,” she added in her appearance on

CNN’s “State of the Union” program.

Her Republican counterpart in the House, Representative Mike Rogers of Michigan, described the growing strength of the Taliban as “a huge problem” and insisted that “we ought to have a hard discussion about saying, listen, war is when one side wins and one side loses.”

In another indication of the instability of the occupation and in particular the crisis confronting its strategy of shifting security operations to Afghan forces, an Afghan uniformed as a military policeman shot and killed a US Marine in southern Afghanistan. This killing brought to 19 the number of foreign occupation troops who have been slain in so-called “green-on-blue” attacks since the year began. A spokesman for the occupation, Brig. Gen. Carsten Jacobsen, asserted that such “incidents are small in number” but acknowledged “the gravity they have as an effect on morale.”

While the Pentagon did not immediately identify the slain Marine, Deborah Huling of West Chester Township, Ohio confirmed to local media that she was informed by Marines Sunday that her 25-year-old son, Sgt. J.P. Huling, had been fatally wounded in such an incident.

She told the *Cincinnati Enquirer* that her son did not believe that US troops should be in Afghanistan. “Many of his fellow marines had been killed, and other soldiers, and he just thought it was senseless,” she said. “He didn’t think we should be over there.”

She said that her son, a bomb disposal specialist, had not been due to deploy to Afghanistan until October, but had been sent six months early because of losses in his unit.

The number of US troops killed in Afghanistan since the beginning of “Operation Enduring Freedom” now stands at 1,961. Over 1,100 of them have died since Obama took office in 2009.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact