

Pentagon Paints Bleak Picture of Afghanistan War as More Civilians Die

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A semi-annual report released by the Pentagon on the Afghanistan war recorded a sharp increase in attacks on occupation troops and scarce support for the corrupt US-backed puppet regime of President Hamid Karzai.

The progress report, mandated by the US Congress, presented a grim picture of the state of the nearly nine-year-old, US-led war, even as a series of incidents in which civilians were killed by US and NATO troops unleashed renewed popular anger against the foreign occupation.

The Obama administration's dispatch of 50,000 more US troops to Afghanistan over the past year notwithstanding, the 150-page Pentagon report allowed that the country's so-called insurgents considered 2009 their "most successful year," and that the resistance to the occupation had a "robust means of sustaining its operation."

"Its operational capabilities and organizational reach are qualitatively and geographically expanding," the report said, citing the spread of resistance activity to several new areas over the last six months.

Violence in the country, according to the report, had increased by a staggering 87 percent between February 2009 and March of this year. Pentagon officials attributed the spike to the deployment of the additional troops in areas that have been strongholds of the Taliban and other groups opposed to the US presence.

Equally revealing is the report's estimate of support for the Karzai government based upon its assessment of opinion in 92 districts. It found that not one district supported the US-backed regime. Forty-four districts were described as neutral and 48 as supportive of or sympathetic to the resistance, a significant increase over the 33 described as backing the anti-occupation fighters in December of last year.

It further acknowledged that the "strength and ability of shadow governance [by the Taliban and other anti-government groups] to discredit the authority and legitimacy of the Afghan government is increasing."

The report gives rather short shrift to the decisive issue of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, devoting just two paragraphs to claiming that the number of civilians killed by US-led troops has fallen in relation to the size of the occupation forces, and blaming the resistance for "using civilians as human shields."

The McClatchy news agency, however, cited the military's own figures indicating "a

dramatic spike in civilian deaths in the first three months of this year.” It reported that the Pentagon acknowledges that US-led forces killed 87 civilians in Afghanistan during that period, compared to 29 during the first quarter of 2009.

These figures are undoubtedly a gross underestimation of the real toll inflicted by US and other foreign occupation forces, given that the Pentagon and NATO routinely deny reports of civilian casualties, claiming that either it has no knowledge of the incidents or that those killed were “insurgents.” Grudging admissions come only after undeniable proof that the victims were civilians is confirmed by Afghan authorities.

A series of recent incidents has underscored the grim and rising toll that the US-led occupation is inflicting upon the Afghan people.

Two women and a young girl were killed, and two others were wounded when NATO troops opened fire April 30 on a car in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

A spokesman for the Afghan authorities said that the occupation troops were defusing a roadside bomb when the car approached and failed to halt after a warning shot.

Witnesses to the incident disputed this version, however, saying that the foreign troops were conducting house-to-house raids in the area and opened fire on the vehicle without any warning.

The killings came a day after angry demonstrators took to the streets throughout eastern Nangarhar province to protest a Wednesday night raid on the home of an Afghan lawmaker in which US troops shot her brother-in-law dead.

The legislator, Safiya Sidiqi, was not at home during the raid. She said that her brother-in-law, who was visiting, thought the compound was being attacked by bandits and left his room with an old hunting rifle, when he was cut down by US troops.

“I was afraid of Taliban, and now I can say the Americans are the enemy of the women of Afghanistan,” she said.

The top US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, had announced orders last January restricting night raids because of the high number of civilian casualties that they have inflicted. Under the new rules of engagement, Afghan puppet forces were supposedly to take the lead when houses were entered.

Other members of the household, however, said that there was no evidence of Afghan troops when some 80 US soldiers entered the compound, rounding up 15 family members, including women and children, and handcuffing and blindfolding them.

The US military claimed that the operation was aimed at catching a “Taliban facilitator” in the area, but no such person was apprehended.

The incident confirmed charges that McChrystal’s earlier order was for show, and that the night raids and their attendant slaughter of innocents continue unabated.

In a separate development, the French military acknowledged Thursday that its troops had killed four children in an April 6 missile attack.

Warnings from top US and NATO officials suggest that the bloodletting will escalate sharply in the coming weeks and months.

Gen. David Petraeus, the head of the US Central Command, which is responsible for the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, warned that there would be “tough moments in the weeks and months ahead” in the city of Kandahar, where the US-led occupation is mobilizing some 23,000 troops for an offensive expected to begin next month.

Excusing in advance the carnage that this US-led offensive will entail, he claimed that it would be the fault of the Afghan resistance, which he said was “going to take horrific actions to disrupt the progress that Afghan and coalition and military elements are working so hard to achieve.”

Concern over rising violence in the city as well as the urban combat that the occupation’s offensive will entail, the United Nations shut down its Kandahar headquarters and withdrew its entire staff from the city.

Petraeus appeared to be providing another justification for the coming bloodshed, claiming that Kandahar was the city in which the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington were prepared in 2001.

A similar note was sounded by NATO’s senior civilian official in Afghanistan, Mark Sedwill, the former British ambassador to the country. He warned that the coming period would be “very tough” for the occupation forces and insisted, “We cannot allow judgment of success to be the absence of casualties.”

Sedwill predicted that the US-led forces would be involved for up to four more years in combat operations in Afghanistan and would remain in the country for up to 15 years more training and “mentoring” Afghan puppet forces.

The military “surge” ordered by Obama is expected to be in complete by August, with some 100,000 US troops deployed in Afghanistan, up from 32,000 when he took office.

The message contained in the Pentagon’s grim report, however, appears to be that US military commanders want still more American soldiers and Marines thrown into the colonial-style war.

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