

US-NATO Killings of Civilians in Afghanistan

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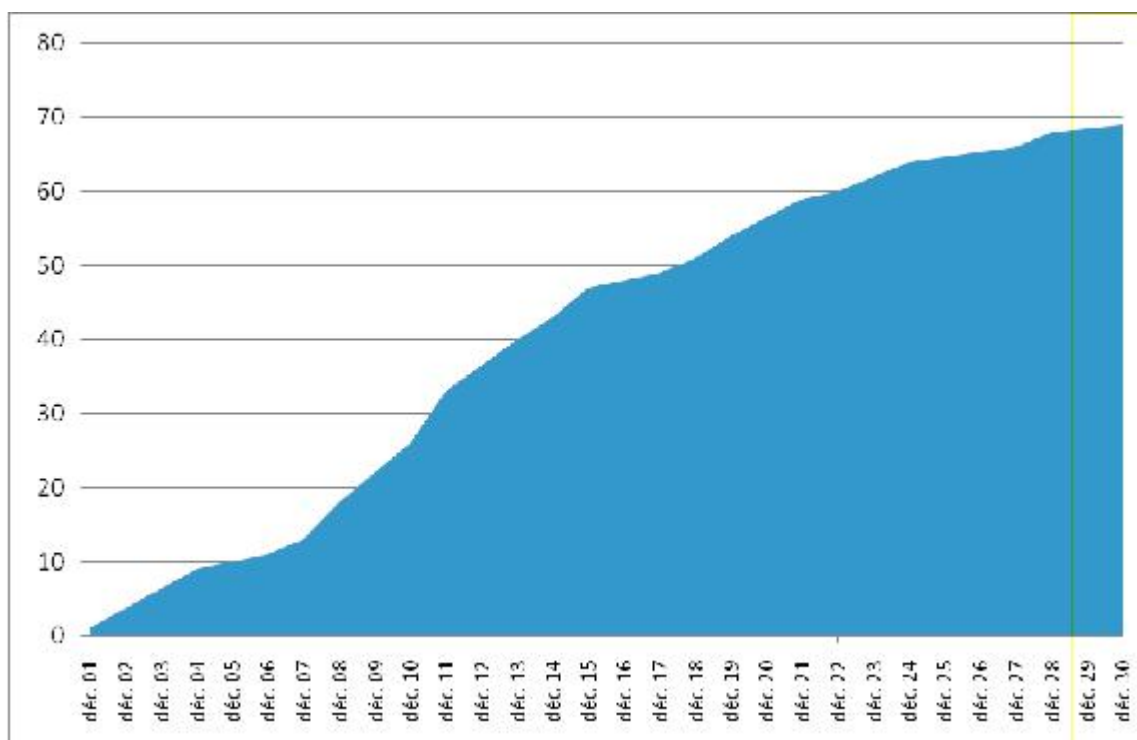
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The Obama administration's effort to persist in carrying out a deadly war in Afghanistan outside the public's eye has been succeeding. Three means are employed: tight control over news flowing out of Afghanistan; vastly greater reliance upon secretive night raids by U.S. Special Forces; and a stepped-up use of private contractors/mercenaries on the ground in Afghanistan. The latter effort is crucial in helping reduce reported U.S. military casualties in Afghanistan, the primary factor which affects domestic U.S. politics.

Every now and then, the mainstream media reports upon a particularly egregious incident which took place in Afghanistan. Nowhere can a reader get a sense of the overall level of pain inflicted upon average Afghan civilians by the actions of U.S. and NATO occupation forces. This brief essay paints a picture of ground reality in Afghanistan during the month of December 2010. The United Nations' UNAMA releases overall figures, but the data is simply presented in aggregate fashion and we are asked to believe. A skeptic cannot fact check the numbers. We are simply asked to believe these faith-based numbers. As I have noted many times, the UNAMA figures for civilians killed by U.S./NATO actions are at best around 70% of the actual numbers killed. For example, for 2009, the UNAMA captured less than 60% of the civilians who perished.

Graph 1. Cumulative total of civilians killed during December 2010



The graph above plots the cumulative total of Afghan civilians killed in U.S/NATO military actions during December 2010. The total is 68-69 persons, a greater December toll than in the previous two years:

Civilians killed

Foreign occupation forces from hostile action*

Ratio civ to occupation

forces

December 2008

42

26 (US @ 2)

1.58

December 2009

57-61

32 (US @ 15)

1.84

December 2010

68-69

39 (US @ 32)

1.77

*Data from the Web-based compilation at <http://www.icasualties.org/oef/>

The data for 2010 is a serious undercount because of the dramatic increase of deadly night raids by U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) forces whose raids are clandestine and about which only limited reporting exists.

A comparison (Table 1) indicates the level of Afghan civilian deaths at the hands of the foreign occupation forces has oscillated around 900 per year since 2007. On the other hand, the level of foreign occupation soldiers' deaths caused by hostile action has soared since 2007. The share of U.S occupation soldiers' deaths of the total foreign occupation toll has risen from 35% in 2007 to 70% in 2010. The Table demonstrates the crucial role NATO forces played in fighting America's Afghan war during the earlier years. In 2007, NATO casualties accounted for 55% of the total, but by 2010 the figure was a mere 30%.

Table 1. Civilian and Occupation Force Deaths in Afghanistan, 2006-2010

Year

Civilian casualties

Occupation force deaths (@ U.S.)

Ratio of civ deaths to occup. force deaths

2006

660 – 782

130 (65)

5.1 – 6.0

2007

1010 – 1297

184 (83)

5.5 – 7.0

2008

864 – 1017

263 (133)

3.3 – 3.9

2009

936 – 1087

451 (266)

2.1 – 2.4

2010

807 – 915

632 (440)

1.3 – 1.4

Total....

4277 – 5098

1660 (987)

Everyday life in Afghanistan was dangerous for children, women, Afghan Army and Police forces, clerics, road workers, public officials, saying night-time prayers, sleeping, driving to lunch, etc. The relative lethality for Afghan civilians versus U.S/NATO occupation forces is captured by the ratio in the last columns above which derives the ratio of Afghan civilians killed per foreign occupation soldier death. In 2006-7, five Afghan civilians died for every dead occupation soldier, but by 2010 this ratio was only 1.3, reflecting the shift in U.S. tactics towards using ground attacks as opposed to aerial bombing. On the other hand, ground attacks can be very deadly. For December 2010, 19 Afghan civilians died from air attacks, 45-46 from ground strikes and 4 from drone strikes (in the Pakistan border region). The numbers who were killed in secretive night-time SOCOM force strikes are no doubt mostly omitted from the reported totals above.

The following Table 2 presents a summary of the twenty-five U.S/NATO attacks which resulted in Afghan civilians being killed.

Table 2. Deadly Attacks by U.S/NATO forces during December 2010

Date

Place

victims and details

Type of attack

Dec 1-7

Maidan Wardak

1

1 AM night raid

Dec 4

Ghazni

1 girl injured who died

air

Dec 4

Paktia

7 road laborers

ground attack

Dec 6

North Waziristan

2

drone

Dec 7

Logar

2 Afghan Army soldiers

air

Dec 8

Helmand

3 women

air

Dec 8

Kunar

2

ground

Dec 10

Kandahar

7-8 clergy men

ground

Dec 11-13

Kunar

Estimated 7 killed

ground

Dec 11

Paktia

7

ground

Dec 14

Marja, Helmand

1

air

Dec 14

Kunduz

2

ground

Dec 15/16

Helmand

4 Afghan Army soldiers

air

Dec 17

Nangarhar

2

night raid

Dec 18/19

Helmand

2 men (Abdul Aziz and Eid Gul)

night raid

Dec 19

Nangarhar

3

air

Dec 21

Helmand

2 children

ground

Dec 21

Helmand

3 women

ground

Dec 22

Ghazni

1

air

Dec 23

Faryab

2 men (incl Mohammad Aminuddin)

air

Dec 24

Kabul city

2 night guards

night raid

Dec 27

Kapisa

2 sons of Mosafir (Walid and Khan)

mortar fire

Dec 28

North Waziristan

Estimated 2

drone

Dec 30

Maidan Wardak

Injured girl dies

ground

The provinces with the highest civilian toll were Helmand (15), Paktia (14), and Kunar (9).

Details beyond those mentioned in the Table are hard to come by for many of the attacks. The raid carried out on December 18, 2010 in the Lashkari bazaar area by NATO forces accompanied by the notorious soldiers of the Afghan National Security directorate, all of a sudden arrived by helicopter as the guests Eid Gul and Abdul Aziz, both aged over 50, were preparing for evening prayer. The attackers stormed into the home, killing both guests, injuring another man and abducting two other people.

At 11 A.M., on December 23rd, a NATO helicopter opened fire on a convoy of five cars driving 5 kms outside the provincial capital, Maymana of Faryab province. The travelers were going to a luncheon event hosted by a local council head. The NATO helicopter strafed one vehicle killing a police officer and Mohammad Aminuddin, brother of former Afghan parliament member Sarajuddin Mozafari. Two other policemen and a civilian were wounded.

Conclusion

The death tolls for Afghan civilians killed by U.S/NATO actions were 54-61 for November and 149-165 for October 2010. Nothing suggests a change in this daily slaughter. As Hornberger asserted in the "The Banality of Killing," average Americans place no value upon the lives of Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistanis. Killing them has been normalized and trivialized. Any ways, "they" hide amongst civilians or are terrorists or enemy combatants. As Hornberger put it,

Never mind that our public officials have had 10 years to kill terrorists and enemy combatants to their hearts' content but apparently still haven't gotten them all. Never mind that the terrorists and enemy combatants might well now consist primarily of people who are simply trying to oust their country of a foreign occupier, like people did when it was the Soviet Union that was doing the occupying. Never mind that the number of terrorists and enemy combatants continues to rise with each new killing. It's all just part and parcel of the new normality for American society.

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