

WIKILEAKS: COVERUP OF WAR CRIMES IN AFGHANISTAN: Washington Lied About 2009 Bala Baluk Massacre, Red Cross Concealed Truth

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

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 The Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten has published [an article](#) on NATO, US, and the Red Cross and the Bala Baluk massacre on May 4, 2009. The article features a cable that shows the Red Cross put together a report that raised significant doubt about military reports on the number of civilians killed. The cable reveals how a PR campaign kicked into gear to sell the idea that the deaths were not intentional and to skew coverage of the event to fit the interests of NATO and US forces in Afghanistan.

The June 13, 2009 cable describes a remarkable meeting that took place at the US Embassy in Kabul. Leader of the Red Cross in Afghanistan, Reto Stocker, has compiled a report with exact figures on the deaths of civilians in an attack that just took place in the village of Bala Baluk Grenari region. US and NATO forces, which contend they were attacking Taliban, dropped bombs leaving a mosque in ruins. They turned the village into "an inferno of screaming, mangled and bloody people."

In the aftermath, the Taliban and Afghan officials claimed "over 140 civilians had been killed." Karl W. Eikenberry, US ambassador in Kabul, said at a news conference, "We will never know the exact number" of those killed. Red Cross commander Reto Stocker said, "'Dozens' of people were killed." A commission investigated the incident and concluded, "26 civilians and 78 Taliban fighters were killed."

The claims by the US and other military forces were blatant lies, according to the cable. On top of that, the Red Cross did not challenge the lies. . . .

In [the cable](#), Stocker visits Ambassador Eikenberry and delivers a copy of a report on the Bala Baluk massacre on June 13. He describes the process for putting the report together:

ICRC representatives visited Bala Baluk 3 times after May 4 to gather

information, interview local residents, and get the lay of the land. They interviewed more than 50 villagers in Ganjabad and Gerani over a period of 13 days. They avoided compiling lists of victims, but did provide a complete list of interviewees in their report. They also did not use graves as evidence since many of the villagers described finding only body parts that were not suitable for normal burial.

Upon presenting the report, he concedes power in the meeting, clarifying to the ambassador that he does not believe the Red Cross is “an investigative body” and that the report “was prepared to assist the authorities in their own investigations. Having minimized the Red Cross’ potential to be a watchdog organization, Stocker then says he is confident in the report’s findings that 89 civilians were killed and another 13 injured:

In a detailed discussion with the Ambassador on the sequence of events, Stocker agreed with U.S. military officials that the first group of individuals hit with the first bomb from the B-1 near the mosque were insurgents. He found no villagers who alleged that civilians were killed in that strike. However, he did not agree that subsequent lines of people observed moving rapidly between structures were insurgents. He showed photos of narrow paths where the movements took place, saying they tied in with the aerial video, and described multiple accounts by witnesses of families fleeing the battle with parents carrying children in their arms. Stocker said that 47 and 42 residents were killed in the second and third strikes, respectively. In support of this claim, he made the case that it would have been illogical for insurgents not killed in the first bombing to continue to gather in groups that could be targeted from above, whereas it would have been logical for civilians to have sought shelter away from the fighting.

Ambassador Eikenberry thanks Stocker for the review and says he will continue to follow the official investigation (which will later conclude the number of deaths is much lower than the figure in the Red Cross report). Eikenberry notes the “low-key and subdued discussion of the events of May 4 by the villagers who were most affected by it,” and suggests the “low-key reaction may indicate that casualties were lower than reported by other sources.” (Of course, that could also be a result of villagers being afraid of soldiers from forces that just bombed their village.)

The diplomat that wrote the cable writes in the comment section, “Reto Stocker is one of the most credible sources for unbiased and objective information in Afghanistan, and has 4 years of experience as head of the ICRC mission here. The ICRC survey of local villagers is certainly exhaustive, and the report finds significant consistency in the testimonies provided. At the same time, Stocker twice mentioned that they had placed a great deal of confidence in the statements of one particular source, later noting that the Red Crescent had an office near where the evening’s fighting took place. The list of interviewees mentions no one associated with the Red Crescent.”

The last couple sentences seem like a feeble attempt to cast a bit of suspicion on the process for putting together the report. Clearly, the diplomat believes Stocker was likely telling the truth, otherwise, why end with the comment that was written? Why not call into question specific details?

Sadly, Stocker abrogated his duty and chose to not release the truth to the public. When Aftenposten asked the Red Cross about why the Red Cross hadn’t gone ahead and released

the report, a spokesman for the International Red Cross in Geneva told the newspaper, "This was a confidential report in which we took up our humanitarian concerns directly with the authorities or the parties to the conflict."

The newspaper correctly asks in its article on the WikiLeaks cable, "Is it not in the Red Cross' interest that the truth of such an event becomes publicly known?" Apparently, the spokesman tells the newspaper, "This is standard procedure to ensure maximum protection in the short and long term, both for civilian and other parties affected by the hostilities."

Aftenposten also reports "former UN Special Representative in Afghanistan Kai Eide said that he refrained from publishing a highly critical statement about the Bala Baluk after a meeting with the American general who investigated the massacre."

- In our investigations we came to 64 killed, but when we included only women and children. We did not expect some men, since it could be a possibility that some of them were Taliban members. I met with General Raymond A. Thomas, who led the American investigators. He showed several hours of video footage from the fighting and the attack, and his conclusion was that nothing wrong had happened. I did not send out the statement in the belief that the general spoke true."

Eide acknowledges that what he believed turned out not to be true and that he no longer has the confidence in the military forces that he had when he was a UN Special Representative. But, why didn't he note how commanders time and time again since at least July 2007 were making pledges to change rules of engagement, to take more care and be cautious, but yet the murder of Afghan civilians continued to occur?

That was the note that Brave New Films made when it [called into question](#) the US and NATO's handling of public relations in the aftermath of the Balu Baluk massacre. They noted how the statements of regret from officials would seem to be sincere but given the chronic failure to adjust rules of engagement it was clearly no longer genuine to say things like, "This is something I worry about a lot. If we lose the Afghan people, we have lost the war."

The massacre was just another incident that called into questions the actions of US and NATO forces. The Nawabad massacre on August 21, 2008, which concluded with the deaths of ninety civilians, including sixty children and fifteen women, had been just as atrocious. Yet another atrocity was the Kunduz massacre on September 4 2009 when two tank cars that rebels took were bombed by US fighter jets called in by German ISAF troops resulted in seventy to ninety, mostly civilians, being killed.

Hours after Aftenposten published this article, there are no articles on the web reporting this revelation.

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