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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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US soldiers posed with militants' body parts in Afghanistan

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328The emergence of a series of new photos showing American troops in Afghanistan smiling while they pose with the dead bodies of suspected militants have brought the Afghan war in focus.

The Los Angeles Times reported on Wednesday that an American soldier gave 18 photos of soldiers posing with corpses to the paper to draw attention to the safety risk of a breakdown in leadership and discipline that he believed compromised the safety of US troops.

The photos were taken on different occasions in the southern Zabol Province in 2010 and were

submitted to *The Times* by a soldier from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division on condition of anonymity.

The US Army said it has launched a "criminal investigation." The US Embassy in Kabul condemned the photos in a statement.

A series of similar scandals by American troops have strained relations between the United States and Afghanistan.

A deadly shooting rampage by US troops on March 11 is the latest incident that enraged the Afghan public. Afghan villagers said a group of American troops broke into their homes, asking about the Taliban. Witnesses said they told the troops that there were no Taliban there, but they started shooting at people anyway.

While the US military announced only one soldier was to blame for the violence, a fact-finding mission set up by the Afghan parliament said at least 20 US soldiers were involved in the massacre of 16 civilians, including nine children, in the district of Panjwaii in Kandahar.

On February 20, US soldiers burned the copies of the Holy Qur'an and other Islamic texts at the US-run Bagram Airbase, located 11 kilometers (7 miles) southeast of the city of Charikar in Parwan Province. The incident triggered riots that left 30 people dead and led to the deaths of six American soldiers.

The desecration of the holy Qur'an underscores the insensitivity of the US-led forces to the cultural and religious values and rituals of Afghanistan more than 10 years after they invaded the country.

On January 13, a video showed four US Marines urinating on Afghan corpses. In the 39-second video, the four soldiers in combat gear and carrying weapons are seen acting in unison as they stand over the corpses and urinate. They sigh and laugh. One of the marines says "Have a great day, buddy" while another comments "Golden, like a shower."

There have been many large demonstrations across Afghanistan against the presence of US-led troops in the country one decade after the beginning of the war. There are currently some 130,000 US-led forces in the war-wracked country.