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Obama Readies Troops as Afghans Pile Up

Body Parts

Posted By [Jeremy Scahill](#)

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As rage spreads in Afghanistan after US bombing that killed up to 130 people, unnamed Pentagon officials are spinning another cover-up. Defiant Obama moves ahead with troop increase.

As President Barack Obama prepares to send some 21,000 more US troops into Afghanistan, anger is rising in the western province of Farah, the scene of a US bombing [massacre](#) that may have killed as many as 130 Afghans, including 13 members of one family. At least six houses were bombed and among the dead and wounded are women and children. As of this writing reports indicate some people remain buried in rubble. The US airstrikes happened on Monday and Tuesday. Just hours after Obama met with US-backed president Hamid Karzai Wednesday, hundreds of Afghans — perhaps as many as 2,000 — poured into the streets of the provincial capital, chanting “Death to America.” The protesters demanded a US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In Washington, Karzai said he and the US occupation forces should operate from a “higher platform of morality,” saying, “We must be conducting this war as better human beings,” and recognize that “force won’t buy you obedience.” And yet, his security forces opened fire on the demonstrators, reportedly wounding five people.

[According](#) to *The New York Times*:

In a phone call played on a loudspeaker on Wednesday to outraged members of the Afghan Parliament, the governor of Farah Province, Rohul Amin, said that as many as 130 civilians had

been killed, according to a legislator, Mohammad Naim Farahi. Afghan lawmakers immediately called for an agreement regulating foreign military operations in the country.

“The governor said that the villagers have brought two tractor trailers full of pieces of human bodies to his office to prove the casualties that had occurred,” Mr. Farahi said. “Everyone at the governor’s office was crying, watching that shocking scene.”

Mr. Farahi said he had talked to someone he knew personally who had counted 113 bodies being buried, including those of many women and children. Later, more bodies were pulled from the rubble and some victims who had been taken to the hospital died, he said.

The US airstrikes hit villages in two areas of Farah province on Monday night and Tuesday. The extent of the deaths only came to public light because local people brought 20-30 corpses to the provincial capital. If the estimates of 130 dead are confirmed, it would [reportedly](#) be the single largest number of deaths caused by a US bombing since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. While Secretary of State Hillary Clinton initially “apologized” Wednesday for the civilian deaths and Obama reportedly conveyed similar sentiments to Karzai when they met in person, later in the day Clinton’s spokesperson, Robert Wood, framed her apology as being based on preliminary information and, [according to AP](#), said they “were offered as a gesture, before all the facts of the incident are known.” By day’s end, the Pentagon was seeking to blame the Taliban for “staging” the massacre to blame it on the US. Last night, NBC News’s Pentagon correspondent Jim Miklaszewski [said](#) military sources told him Taliban fighters used grenades to kill three families to “stage” a massacre and then blame it on the US.

The senior US military and NATO commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David McKiernan, spoke in general terms: “We have some other information that leads us to distinctly different conclusions about the cause of the civilian casualties,” he said. McKiernan left the specific details of the spin to unnamed officials.

[According](#) to *The Washington Post*, “A U.S. defense official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that ‘the Taliban went to a concerted effort to make it look like the U.S. airstrikes caused this. The official did not offer evidence to support the claim, and could not say what had caused the deaths.’” Meanwhile, [according](#) to the *Associated Press*, a senior Defense official who did not want to be identified “said late Wednesday that Marine special operations forces believe the Afghan civilians were killed by grenades hurled by Taliban militants, who then loaded some of the bodies into a vehicle and drove them around the village, claiming the dead were victims of an American airstrike. A second U.S. official said a senior Taliban commander is believed to have ordered the grenade attack.”

As the AP reported, “it would be the first time the Taliban has used grenades in this way.”

While the Pentagon spins its story, the International Committee of the Red Cross has [stated bluntly](#) that US airstrikes hit civilian houses and revealed that an ICRC counterpart in the Red Crescent was among the dead. “We know that those killed included an Afghan Red Crescent volunteer and 13 members of his family who had been sheltering from fighting in a house that was bombed in an air strike,” said the ICRC’s head of delegation in Kabul, Reto Stocker. “We

are deeply concerned by these events. Tribal elders in the villages called the ICRC during the fighting to report civilian casualties and ask for help. As soon as we heard of the attacks we contacted all sides to warn them that there were civilians and injured people in the area.”

Read the entire ICRC statement [here](#).

The *Times*, meanwhile, interviewed local people who contradict the unnamed US Defense officials’ version of events:

Villagers reached by telephone said many were killed by aerial bombing. Muhammad Jan, a farmer, said fighting had broken out in his village, Shiwan, and another, Granai, in the Bala Baluk district. An hour after it stopped, the planes came, he said.

In Granai, he said, women and children had sought shelter in orchards and houses. “Six houses were bombed and destroyed completely, and people in the houses still remain under the rubble,” he said, “and now I am working with other villagers trying to excavate the dead bodies.”

He said that villagers, crazed with grief, were collecting mangled bodies in blankets and shawls and piling them on three tractors. People were still missing, he said.

Mr. Agha, who lives in Granai, said the bombing started at 5 p.m. on Monday and lasted until late into the night. “People were rushing to go to their relatives’ houses, where they believed they would be safe, but they were hit on the way,” he said.

In her earlier statement regarding the bombing, Clinton told Hamid Karzai “there will be a joint investigation by your government and ours.”

But before that investigation began, the Pentagon was already using its unnamed officials to blame the Taliban. It also bears remembering that the US track record of thoroughly “investigating” US massacres is pathetic. The UN said there was [convincing](#) evidence that last year’s US attack on the village of Azizabad in western Afghanistan killed 90 civilians, but the military only acknowledged 30 civilian deaths.

Standing between Hamid Karzai and Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday, Obama said the US would “make every effort” to avoid civilian deaths in both countries (which are regularly bombed by the US). But as he was making those remarks, Defense Secretary Robert Gates was arriving in Kabul on [Wednesday](#) “to make sure that preparations were moving forward for the troop increase and that soldiers and Marines were getting the equipment they needed.”

Jessica Barry, a spokesperson for the ICRC said, “With more troops coming in, there is a risk that civilians will be more and more vulnerable.”