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February 6, 2009: U.S.-led NATO forces strike two houses in a "night raid" in a village near Shar-e-Safa in Zabul province, Afghanistan. Six are killed and two arrested. [The U.S. Central Command \(CENTCOM\) issues a press statement](#) reporting that those killed had been "militants" while "24 women and 45 children were protected from harm."

Local officials protested that those killed were innocent civilians. "Six people in the two houses were killed and two more were arrested, all civilians," Mohammad Khasin Graned, chief of the Provincial Council, told China's Xinhua News Agency on the same day CENTCOM issued its statement. He also said villagers were planning to launch a protest against the killings. ("Raid of international troops kills 6 civilians in S Afghanistan," People's Daily Online, February 6, 2009)

This U.S.-led attack received, at most, scant—if any—coverage in the U.S. media. But now, secret State Department cables published by WikiLeaks paint a picture of the kinds of attacks and escalating carnage the U.S. continues to carry out across Afghanistan under President Obama, and the rage generated among the Afghan people. And a deeper look into the *pattern* of such massacres provides an insight into the *nature* of U.S. imperialism's bloody war in Afghanistan.

"When the villages hear the sound of helicopters at night..."

A February 12, 2009 State Department cable provides some sense of the nature of U.S. night raids, like the one on February 5, 2009. It paints a picture of the intense reaction provoked by the February 5 Special Forces attack. One delegation of tribal elders, religious leaders and Provincial Council members told U.S. officials: "Stop the night raids which terrify women and children." They told U.S. officials that "many district families had abandoned their homes and livestock," and that "when the villages hear the sound of helicopters at night, the men flee into

caves out of fear, not guilt."

Demonstrations of 300 and then 800 people took place in the town of Qalat within days after the killings. Afghan officials told U.S. officials the mood at the rallies was "frightening" and "scary."

Zabul province, where the February 6 attack took place, has a population of roughly 270,000 people. Located in south Afghanistan, it is one of the most remote and impoverished regions in one of the world's most impoverished countries. Three decades of imperialist invasions and wars (from the Soviet invasion in 1979 through the U.S. invasion and current occupation) have wreaked havoc on the irrigation canals essential for growing wheat, almonds, grapes, and apricots. Now poppies for opium are one of the few crops grown. Less than 10 percent of the people are literate; of the district's 136 schools, only 10 are functioning. (*Washington Post*, May 1, 2009)

The February 12, 2009 State Department cable noted, "Another special operation with casualties could tip the balance in Zabul towards anti-coalition forces," and there is "the firm public conviction that CF [U.S. Coalition Forces] are killing civilians and treating women badly." ("US embassy cables: Afghan tribal elders threaten to 'fight Nato like the Soviets,'" *Guardian UK*, December 3, 2010)

Night raids that kill women and children and others are designed to, and do, create an atmosphere of generalized terror among Afghan civilians. And, in spite of widespread outrage among civilians noted in diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks and elsewhere, the raids are a fundamental part of the U.S. and its allies' war in Afghanistan.

State Department cables report on a prior series of similar night raids across Zabul in December 2008 and January 2009.

A January 19, 2009 cable describes the outcry after "at least six operations since mid-December" led to charges of "civilian casualties" and "wrongful detentions." The cable also reports, "Two special operations missions in December 2008 in Arghandab district allegedly displaced up to 200 families, who fled to Qalat [a town of some 10,000 people and the capital of Zabul province]." ("WikiLeaks cables: Afghan elders threaten to display civilian victims' bodies," *Guardian UK*)

, December 3, 2010)

On January 9, five more people were killed in a U.S. attack in Jaldak, southwest of Qalat. According to the cable, "The Jaldak elders maintain the innocence of the dead and detained, to the point that they refused to bury the bodies and threatened to display them on Highway 1....among the five dead males were an 80 year-old, a 70 year-old, an 18 year-old, a 20-year-old and 30 year-old—leaving no men in that household. The governor suggested to PRT [the U.S. coalition's Provincial Reconstruction Team] that they were not enemies but allies of the government."

These cables, previous WikiLeaks revelations, and other studies show that such killings are not "isolated incidents" or "regrettable" errors, but are part of a broader pattern of escalating murder and violence being inflicted on the Afghan people by both the U.S.-led coalition and the reactionary Islamic fundamentalist Taliban and its allies.

In July, WikiLeaks released 92,000 secret field reports filed by U.S. military forces between January 2004 and December 2009 that documented widespread atrocities and war crimes, including those listed in this Al Jazeera summary: "A string of shootings by British troops in a non-combat zone resulting in scores of dead civilians; a highway rampage by US troops; a deaf boy shot at when orders barked at him did not illicit [elicit] a response; a previously unknown US special forces unit reporting directly to the White House, as well as a 'capture kill' list with which they operated, and their botched up missions that resulted in scores of casualties, including the deaths of children at an Islamic school....Some 200 files contained in the war logs reveal that Task Force 373 was a US special forces unit operating with a 'kill or capture' list of supposed Taliban and al-Qaeda commanders, which reportedly numbered well over 2,000 people." ("Searching for accountability," Al Jazeera, October 10, 2010)

Evidence has also come to light that a "kill team" has been operating out of the U.S. Army's 5th Stryker Brigade that has been murdering Afghan civilians "for sport" and committing other crimes including "mutilating their bodies, and collecting fingers and skulls from corpses as trophies." The Pentagon has announced it will conduct an investigation. ("US Military Investigates 'Death Squad' Accused of Murdering Afghans," *Guardian UK*, December 30, 2010; "Troops Accused of Killing Afghans for Sport," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2010)

The UN recently reported that 2,412 civilians were killed and 3,803 were injured by U.S.-led forces and the Taliban in the first 10 months of 2010, a 20 percent rise compared to the same period in 2009. The UN claimed that U.S.-NATO forces were responsible for killing or wounding 742 Afghans, but as the WikiLeaks revelations have demonstrated, much carnage in Afghanistan goes unreported. Marc Herold, Associate Professor of Economic Development and Women's Studies at the University of New Hampshire and contributor to globalresearch.ca, estimates that between 8,705 and 10,283 civilians have been killed by U.S.-NATO forces since the beginning of the war. (See "Pentagon Lies and Afghan Civilian Deaths: The Unspoken Truth," Global Research, December 8, 2010)

In August, one woman told a *Washington Post* reporter, "Many times NATO troops and these cars have killed our innocent people. They never care whether we are Afghans or animals." ("Afghans march in Kabul to denounce NATO strikes that killed civilians," *Washington Post*, August 2, 2010)

An Imperialist Occupation... Resting On Terror

Why does the U.S. military carry out such massacres and atrocities—on an increasing scale—even as they talk of "winning hearts and minds"? In coming coverage, we'll explore what State Department cables published by WikiLeaks show about the nature and role of the Karzai regime. And how maintaining and propping up that regime has been both seen as necessary by the U.S. and has been fraught with intense contradictions that present the U.S. with real difficulties in carrying out its strategic goals in Afghanistan.

But here it can be said that the U.S. military and NATO forces in Afghanistan—and the way they fight—are in the most basic sense defined by the exploitative and oppressive world relations they represent and enforce. Before mid-2009, they relied heavily on air power (including drones and helicopters), high-tech weapons, heavy bombardment of villages from afar, and indiscriminate killing of civilians.

These war-fighting tactics—mass and indiscriminate death from the sky—in turn gave rise to even more outrage broadly in Afghan society against the U.S. U.S. military analysts have repeatedly raised concerns about this approach—not over the immorality of killing, but over the fact that such atrocities are pushing people into the arms of the Taliban.

In response to these big problems, the U.S., over about the last year and a half, has tried to adjust its military strategy in Afghanistan, drawing on what they perceive as the lessons of the genocidal U.S. war in Vietnam. Those adjustments include more emphasis on massive ground troops in conjunction with air strikes; taking and occupying large swaths of territory; killing insurgents and then trying to form alliances with reactionary local forces (including sections of the Taliban willing to be incorporated into the overall objectives of the U.S.)—all in order to establish pro-U.S. governance. The U.S. military tries to "win the hearts and minds" of civilians—hoping they will not aid, abet, and join the forces fighting the United States.

But a) such adjustments are not a "kinder, gentler" occupation—in 2009, civilian casualties in Afghanistan climbed to their highest number since the start of the war. (UN Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2009); and b) the U.S. military is an occupying army—its mission by definition is brutal and murderous—and all about U.S. domination. The more it bombs, murders, tortures, etc., the more it alienates the people. A central goal of the U.S. war in Afghanistan is subduing—by any means necessary—a population in which most don't want to be under foreign domination. Thousands of people in Afghanistan have experienced the brutality and murder of the U.S. troops and they distrust, if not hate, the American occupiers and the Afghani flunkies the U.S. put in the government.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan is, first and foremost, a war of empire, a war of domination, a war NOT in the interests of the people of Afghanistan. And this is why—no matter what changes the military may implement—brutality, murder, and civilian massacres remain as core elements of their war.

Night raids, special operations, covert assassinations, extrajudicial killings, drone strikes, the use of military contractors, massive detentions and torture, and all-around terror are embedded in the nature of this imperialist occupation. And every U.S. massacre of civilians, only fuels anti-U.S. sentiment—no matter how hard the U.S. tries to "win hearts and minds" by building a few schools.

(For an in-depth exploration of the contradictions the U.S. faces in its war and occupation of Afghanistan, see, "Obama Dismisses McChrystal: The Firing of a War Criminal.... And the Criminal War in Afghanistan," *Revolution* #206, July 4, 2010.)

A Pentagon review of the military situation in Afghanistan released on December 16 claimed that Obama's 30,000-troop escalation, drone strikes, and stepped up night attacks had weakened the Taliban and reduced its influence in its traditional strongholds of Kandahar and Helmand provinces. The report "singled out night raids' usefulness," the *Wall Street Journal* reported. "U.S. officials credit a sharp increase in the number of raids with putting heavy pressure on insurgents. They say their intention is to keep up the pace of operations, if not accelerate them. Last month, Mr. Obama rebuffed Mr. Karzai's call for halting the raids."

("Obama Cites Afghan Gains as Report Says Exit Is on Track,"

New York Times

, December 16, 2010; "U.S. Revises Rules for Raids Touted in Review,"

Wall Street Journal

, December 16, 2010)

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden recently called WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange a "high tech terrorist." (*Meet the Press*, December 19, 2010) In reality, it's the U.S. imperialists who are the "high tech terrorists" in Afghanistan—and around the world. For Biden and the U.S. ruling class, Assange's "crime" is exposing *their* terror and *their* crimes.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan—with all its horrors and atrocities—has become acceptable for far too many people. Recent material published by WikiLeaks has revealed even more clearly the depths of the horrors the people of Afghanistan are being subjected to, and the role of the U.S. behind these crimes. And these new revelations—including those published by WikiLeaks—have again thrust the horrors the U.S. is imposing on the people of Afghanistan into public view. People need to stand up and oppose these war criminals and this whole criminal war. We need to build mass opposition to the U.S. war in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan—as part of building a movement for revolution. And the more U.S. imperialism faces big contradictions, problems, difficulties, and divisions—the more the people need to be stepping up the struggle against this murderous system.