

U.S., NATO In South Asia: Eleven Years Of Carnage

Mr. President, how many kids have been killed in AfPak?

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A reported by Reuters, Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday condemned a NATO operation that he said killed four children in the country's east.

"Despite repeated pledges by NATO to avoid civilian casualties, innocent lives, including those of children, are still being lost," Karzai said in the statement.

The report does not sound like anything outstanding - reports like this one have been appearing lately with an accelerated frequency. But in this case, despite the general practice of denying any wrongdoing, a spokeswoman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said it was aware of possible ISAF-related civilian casualties from the operation in Baraki Barak district of Logar province last Saturday.

At the same time, the spokeswoman for ISAF presented figures intended to demonstrate that there was a 58 percent decrease in the number of ISAF-caused civilian casualties in July-September of this year compared to the same period in 2011.

Indeed, the whole issue of statistics of the kind is more than tricky. More often than not, to avoid showing the real numbers, the US and NATO officials tend to label all those killed as militants, thus drastically reducing the number of civilian casualties. Most probably, in this case when children were killed, playing this trick became impossible.

The eleventh anniversary of the Afghan operation gave analysts an opportunity to try to evaluate the total number of casualties in Afghanistan and Pakistan (the so called AfPak) within this period. The Huffington Post has published a piece written by two US scholars, Neta C. Crawford from Boston University and Catherine Lutz from Brown University. The figures they present speak for themselves.

The number of foreign troops and military contractors is calculated more or less accurately. During the 11 years of war, more than 2,130 Americans and more than 1,065 other ISAF military and 1,284 US military contractors have been killed. The picture is much worse for Afghans and Pakistanis. What is striking in the study is the fact that though the war is going on in Afghanistan, the number of casualties among Pakistanis (including civilians) is even higher. This can be ascribed to the excessive use of drones.

The number of militants killed is estimated at 15,000 to 25,000 for Afghanistan and 25,000 for Pakistan. The number of civilian casualties is almost the same or even higher - 15,500 to 17,400 for Afghanistan and 14,780 to 43,150 for Pakistan. The total number of casualties in

Afghanistan and Pakistan in direct war-related violence is estimated at up to 128,500. The number does not include indirect deaths caused by loss of access to food, water and infrastructure. Plus a recent UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported documents about 500,000 Pakistanis who are living outside of their homes as a result of warfare.

Now the big question that arises from the deplorable statistics is - what's next? Plans for the troops withdrawal from Afghanistan have been announced and have not been rejected yet, although it is truly impossible to believe that the US is going to abandon the vital strategic region. But, as the authors in the Huffington Post point out, "the current plan is to pull US troops out of Afghanistan in 2014, but there is no plan to halt military assistance to Pakistan or US drone strikes there," and "withdrawal from Afghanistan will likely leave a war in place in Pakistan."

What kind of war this is going to be is another question. It is hard to imagine that the US strategists - whatever their appetites may be - would venture on a new war against a nuclear country like Pakistan. But the outlines of their future (or, better say, continuing) operation there has been made clear both by previous experience and recent developments.

The use of drones, widely criticized by the Western public and experts, and raising outrage in AfPak is probably the main method the US and its allies will rely upon in future warfare. It allows to diminish the number of allied military killed down to zero, while effectively inflicting devastating damage to manpower and infrastructure of the targeted country.

In a sign of proof of such supposition, on Monday London's the Guardian revealed that the Royal Air Force is going to double the number of armed drones flying combat and surveillance operations in Afghanistan and the aircraft will be controlled from terminals and screens in Britain. The report came against the background of other widely publicized reports that the UK government is going to speed up the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan.

So, the withdrawal in no way means the end of the war. The war must go on - though in a much more cowardly manner.

Back in the 1960s, American students and professors, who were fed up with the ongoing Vietnam War chanted addressing President Lyndon Johnson, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?" It seems time has come to come up with another slogan of the kind.

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