



Photo: U.S. Department of Defense

THE GARDEZ MASSACRE*



Photo: AP

Blood at Gardez, Afghanistan, Friday, February 12, 2010.

by Larry Everest

On the evening of February 12, some 25 friends and relatives gathered at the home of Hajji Sharaf Udin in the village of Khataba, a few miles outside Gardez, the capital of Paktia province in eastern Afghanistan.

They were there to celebrate the naming of Udin's newborn grandson. "Sitting together along the walls of a guest room, the men had taken turns dancing while musicians played," *The Times (UK)* later reported.

Around 3:00 am, one of the musicians went outside the compound to use the toilet. Someone shined a light in his eyes. He ran inside yelling the Taliban were outside. Udin's son, Mohammed Dawood, a police commander, went to investigate with his 15-year-old son. Father and son were soon running back across the courtyard. Both were shot by a gunman on the roof. Dawood died instantly. His son was hit twice but lived.

Realizing the attackers were American Special Operations forces and Afghan police, Udin's second son, Zahir, came to the door because he spoke some English. "Don't fire, we work for the Government," he shouted. "While he was talking they fired again," Dawood's mother said. "I saw him fall down."

Three women crouching behind Zahir in the doorway were all killed in the hail of bullets. Bibi Shirin, 22, the mother of four children under 5; Bibi Saleha, 37, the mother of 11 children; and Gulalai, 18. Both mothers were pregnant, Gulalai was engaged.

As if this weren't horror enough, the U.S. forces—who claim to be fundamentally different than the Taliban and fighting for the interests of the Afghan people—assaulted the survivors, who were "restrained and forced to stand barefeet for several hours outside in the cold." (*The Times (UK)*) A UN report called it "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment." Eight were arrested, flown to a U.S.-Afghan base, and held four days for interrogation. All were released without charges.

Murder, Lies, Cover-up

NATO attempted to cover up the massacre. On February 12 it issued a statement titled "Joint Force Operating in Gardez Makes Gruesome Discovery," claiming:

"The joint force went to a compound near the village of Khatabeh, after intelligence confirmed militant activity. Several insurgents engaged the joint force in a fire fight and were killed...When the joint force entered the compound they conducted a thorough search of the area, and found the bodies of three women who had been tied up, gagged and killed. The bodies had been hidden in an adjacent room."

Every part of this statement is a lie. There was no firefight. The victims didn't throw even a stone. The women were not tied up, gagged, hidden or found dead. U.S. forces refused to give the wounded medical treatment. And there has been no investigation or accounting.

The truth about this made-in-the-USA massacre only came out because the people of Gardez refused to be silent. (Their "protests brought Gardez, the capital of Paktia, to a halt," *The Times (UK)* reports.)

Yet U.S. and NATO officials continue to lie and stonewall. As late as March 14, NATO officials continued to claim that the women's deaths were the result of an "honor" killing.

Why? Because murdering civilians is built into the U.S. occupation. NATO's spokesperson admitted that the victims "were not the targets of this particular raid," but still justified their killing saying, "I don't know if they fired any rounds...If you have got an individual stepping out of a compound, and if your assault force is there, that is often the trigger to neutralize the individual. You don't have to be fired upon to fire back." In other words, it's standard U.S. operating procedure to kill Afghans who could possibly be hostile, even if they're in their own homes or simply trying to see who's threatening them.

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. This occupation's central goal is subduing—by any means necessary—a population in which most don't want to be under foreign domination and many have learned through 8 plus bitter years of war and occupation to distrust if not hate the American occupiers and the flunkies they've empowered in Kabul. The goal driving this is furthering U.S. imperialist interests in Afghanistan and the region, not liberating the Afghan people.

The U.S. press, which acts as cheerleaders for the war, has barely covered the story, which *The Times (UK)* broke on March 13.

"They didn't come here to end terrorism. They are terrorists"

The U.S. has offered \$2,000 "compensation" to the family for each victim.

The head of the family said, "Before, when I heard reports of raids like this and elders said [foreign troops] only came to colonize Afghanistan, I told them they are here to help us," said Sayed Mohammed Mal, the vice-chancellor of Gardez University, whose son Mansoor was Gulalai's [one of those murdered] fiancé. "But when I witnessed this in my family's home, I realized I was wrong. Now I accept the things those people told me. I hate [foreign forces]. I hate the Government."

"The foreigners are always talking about human rights. But they don't care about human rights," said Gulalai's father, Mohammed Tahir. "They teach us human rights then they kill a load of civilians. They didn't come here to end terrorism. They are terrorists."

If you pretend there's no war going on, if you say, "give Obama a chance" or "he's doing his best to wind down the war," or if you refuse to actively protest this war, you need to face the fact that you're actually telling the people of Afghanistan that slaughters like these don't bother you enough to really do much of anything about them—or worse, that they're OK with you.

*A longer version of this article (including sources) is available at revcom.us