

Appendix I: Response from US Forces-Afghanistan and Resolute Support

The continuing suffering of the Afghan people is the responsibility of the Taliban and terrorists like Da'esh and al Qaeda. The Taliban's pointless ongoing violence are betrayals of the Afghan people's loud and clear demands for an end to the fighting of the past 40 years. Taliban senior leaders, many of whom are not even in Afghanistan, must listen to the will of the people and stop sending Afghan sons to murder their fellow countrymen, women and children with suicide and car bombs in crowded cities, reckless rockets and indiscriminate roadside explosives. They must stop wrecking infrastructure and threatening humanitarian aid providers.

Senseless continued violence will not go unanswered. Resolute Support remains committed to supporting our Afghan security partners as they protect the people. We are committed to reducing violence but these actions must be reciprocated by all parties.

We are fighting in a complex environment against those who intentionally kill and hide behind civilians, as well as use dishonest claims of non-combatant casualties as propaganda weapons. We hold ourselves to the highest standards of accuracy and accountability and are unceasing in our efforts to mitigate harm to non-combatants and collateral damage. We are the most precise military force in history and learn and challenge ourselves every day to improve how we fight. The Taliban cannot say the same and IS-K and al Qaeda intentionally murder noncombatants.

War will never be "immaculate." The nature of war is horrific, particularly when civilization is challenged by terrorists whose aim is to sow fear, instability and division through spectacular attacks. The battlefield is complex—the fighting is in crowded cities and in populated villages. Our challenges are immense because we face enemies who do not wear uniforms, who hide among women and children, and who use lies about the death of civilians to try and check our effectiveness. The Taliban purposefully operate in ways which result in civilian casualties. They intentionally seek the deaths of innocents by all parties to use them for propaganda and to sow insecurity and instability.

Since they announced the start of what they called their al Fath offensive on April 11, the Taliban have murdered more than 400 innocent Afghans, including more than 60 women and children. They have wounded at least 1,400 more civilians.

The most effective way to end the suffering of non-combatants is to end the fighting. We will continue to partner with the Afghan security forces protecting the people and to judiciously and carefully deliver the military pressure which will create the confidence and political space to end the fighting and contain the threats.

Resolute Support Public Affairs

Kabul, Afghanistan

September 21, 2019

Appendix II: Response from the CIA

The CIA fully agrees with Resolute Support's account of the Taliban's brutal campaign to destabilize the legitimately-elected government of Afghanistan. The Taliban's cruelty and intentional targeting of civilians are the root causes of the Afghan people's continued suffering.

For many years, well-intentioned journalists and non-governmental organizations have published accounts of alleged abuses by Afghan forces like those contained in the Human Rights Watch report. The U.S. Government routinely reviews such serious allegations to determine their validity. Although Human Rights Watch did not provide the CIA time to study the particular allegations in this report, without confirming or denying any particular role in Government of Afghanistan counterterrorism operations, we can say with some confidence that many, if not all, of the claims leveled against Afghan forces are likely false or exaggerated. Past in-depth reviews of similar allegations have shown this to be the case.

These false narratives persist because it is beyond dispute that the Taliban is engaged in a systematic propaganda campaign against Afghan and coalition operations to undermine the local population's confidence in its government and disparage its international partners, including the United States. Taliban media routinely highlight false claims by exaggerating civilian casualties and portraying killed or captured Taliban fighters as innocent civilians. Their strategy is to weaken the Afghan government and drive the United States out of the region by spreading misinformation.

By way of example, on 22 September, a raid by U.S. military and Afghan forces disrupted an al Qa'ida node in Helmand, resulting in several militants killed. The Taliban, however, circulated inaccurate reports that the operation targeted a wedding party and published pictures of the supposed civilian victims, leading hundreds of Afghans to protest the operation. At least some of the alleged civilian casualty photos originated from an unrelated story outside Afghanistan. This is not an isolated incident, but a well-coordinated and widespread propaganda campaign. To further distort public discourse, the Taliban makes use of its clandestine affiliations with tribal leaders and local officials

to spread false or exaggerated claims of civilian casualties in the aftermath of these operations.

Unlike the Taliban, the United States is committed to the rule of law. We neither condone nor would knowingly participate in illegal activities, and we continually work with our foreign partners to promote adherence to the law. We also take extraordinary measures, beyond the minimum legal requirements, to reduce civilian casualties in armed conflict and to strengthen accountability for our actions and those of our partners.

The CIA takes allegations of human rights abuses very seriously, no matter who might have committed them or their motivation. When we receive intelligence indicating that individuals associated with a foreign liaison partner—any foreign liaison partner—have engaged in human rights abuses, we thoroughly review the available information from both clandestine and open sources to determine whether the allegations are valid. If our review raises any concerns about the foreign partner’s conduct, we and other elements of the U.S. Government make our concerns known to the foreign partner, provide guidance and training on the applicable law and best practices, and take appropriate steps to reduce the likelihood of future abuses, including informing our oversight entities. In some cases, the U.S. Government suspends or terminates assistance to underscore the seriousness of our concerns; and in extreme cases, we have chosen to terminate our relationship with a foreign partner altogether.

These practices are well-established, and all of this is subject to rigorous reporting and oversight, both within the Executive Branch and from Congress.

The CIA is proud of the U.S. Government’s work with our coalition partners to defend against the bloody campaign the Taliban still wages on the Afghan people. The Taliban can end the suffering it has inflicted on the Afghan people by putting down their weapons and working with the Government of Afghanistan to bring about a lasting peace.

The CIA appreciates the opportunity provided by Human Rights Watch to provide a preliminary response to the allegations contained within their report. While we have not yet had the time to conduct a thorough review of the claims made prior to publication, we will continue to examine them because we are committed to the rule of law and doing what is right.

Central Intelligence Agency
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