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By Bill Van Auken
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US carries out fresh massacre in Afghanistan, killing entire family with drone strike

A US drone strike in Afghanistan last Friday wiped out an entire family after they were leaving a clinic, including a woman who had just given birth to a child.

Gul Marjan Kochi, the head of the local council in the Alisher district of Khost province, where the strike took place, told *Pajhwok Afghan News* that the attack was launched against a carload of civilians who were heading home from a local hospital after the birth of the baby. He said that three women, two men and the newborn were all slaughtered in the attack.

The account appeared to have been confirmed by the director of the Al-Madina clinic whom *Pajhwok* reported saying that the family had brought in a pregnant woman Friday night and had been discharged at around 11:30 pm after the birth. He said that among those who were present was a nine-year-old girl. Only later did he learn that they had all been killed.

Another account from Afghan officials said that the 25-year-old woman had been brought to the clinic because her health had deteriorated after giving birth at home, and that the baby had not been in the car.

The horrific war crime came just a day after US President Donald Trump flew into the devastated country for a Thanksgiving photo-op with American troops, where he boasted about how much money his administration has funneled to the major military contractors and told the assembled military personnel at Bagram air base that “Victory on the battlefield will always belong to you, the American warrior.”

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The logistical preparations for Trump's hurried visit—he flew for a total of 32 hours there and back from his Mar-a-Lago Florida resort to spend barely three and a half hours at Bagram—provide a different perspective regarding the US “victory on the battlefield” in Afghanistan.

The US president was compelled to fly into Afghanistan under a veil of total secrecy, in an unmarked plane fitted with a port-a-potty, with its lights out and windows shut and all cellphones dead. While there, he was surrounded by a convoy of heavily armed troops even while moving through the most fortified US base in the country.

After 18 years of war, the US-backed regime exerts control over barely half the country, while the Taliban holds sway over more of Afghanistan than at any time since it was ousted from power by the 2001 US invasion.

In the course of his remarks to his captive audience of US troops, Trump made a confused statement about US talks with the Taliban, claiming that they “want to make a deal.” He continued, “They didn't want to do a cease-fire, but now they do want to do a cease-fire,” adding that there had been “tremendous progress.”

Within hours of Trump's speech at Bagram, a spokesman for the Taliban refuted the US president's remarks, saying that, while the Islamist movement's position had not changed, it was ready for renewed talks. While no such negotiations had yet resumed, the spokesman said, the Taliban expected them to begin where they had left off in September, when Trump blew up agreements that had been worked out over a previous year of negotiations.

The Taliban has insisted that it will agree to a cease-fire only after reaching an agreement with Washington. It would be negotiated in subsequent talks with the US-backed regime in Kabul, which the Taliban justifiably regards as a puppet government serving US imperialist interests. A prior cease-fire, it believes, would only serve to prop up a government that it sees as illegitimate.

Trump's claims about an agreement on a cease-fire served to bolster the position of the current head of the US-backed puppet regime, President Ashraf Ghani, who is facing a growing crisis over elections held in September, whose results have yet to be determined. Ghani's opponents, including his principal rival, Abdullah Abdullah, the current “chief executive” of Afghanistan under a power-sharing deal worked out after the last disputed Afghanistan election in 2014, have accused the government of conducting an illegitimate re-count including 300,000 phony ballots. Only Ghani has supported their inclusion.

While Trump had demagogically proclaimed his determination to put an end to Washington's "endless wars," particularly in Afghanistan, the longest US military conflict in American history, he abruptly broke off negotiations with the Taliban in September after planning a meeting with its negotiators at Camp David.

Trump seized upon a Taliban attack in which a US soldier was killed as the pretext for breaking off what had been billed as the sealing of the agreement worked out over the previous year, providing for a partial pullout of US troops and a Taliban guarantee that it would stop Al Qaeda, ISIS or any other group from using territory under its control to launch attacks on the US or its allies.

In reality, Trump's abrogation of the agreements reached between his administration and the Taliban came in response to sharp criticism from within both the US military command and his ostensible political opponents in the Democratic Party, who made a meal of the fact that the Taliban was being invited to Camp David only days before the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington.

Underlying these attacks are differences within the US ruling establishment over global imperialist strategy, with those opposed to a deal with the Taliban seeing the continuation of the war in Afghanistan as necessary to combat both Chinese and Russian influence in the region.

While the US troop deployment in Afghanistan has been cut by 2,000 over the past year to a current force of 12,000, US air strikes have escalated dramatically.

According to the latest United Nations report, these attacks have led to a dramatic increase in civilian casualties. From the beginning of this year until October, according to official figures, US air strikes have killed 579 civilians and wounded 306, nearly a third more than in 2018.

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