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Deadly Afghan-NATO raid sparks protests

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Hundreds of protesters carrying the bodies of two people killed in a NATO-Afghan raid blocked a key road in eastern Afghanistan Tuesday. The demonstrators say the dead were villagers while the coalition says they were Taliban insurgents.

The protest was one of the first since a recent U.S.-Afghan deal on night raids mandated that Afghans were supposed to take the lead in such operations with U.S. forces taking a back seat. But many Afghans still blame the raids on the U.S. and NATO, and they've persisted as a point of disagreement.

Afghans say the raids, especially those carried out at night by American forces and their allies, cause needless civilian deaths and sow terror among the population. The U.S. military considers the raids critical to its operations.

NATO and residents offered competing narratives on what happened during the overnight raid in a village in Laghman province.

NATO said one of the men killed was a Taliban leader wanted for coordinating roadside bombings against coalition forces in the area. It said he and another man opened fire during the Afghan-led operation.

The alliance said several other insurgents were detained.

In the village of Bolan, Mohammad Aziz Khochi said soldiers stormed his house at about 2 a.m. Tuesday and that two of his nephews were killed in the raid.

"My sister thought that thieves had come to the house, and she started shouting," Khochi said. "One of her sons came out and the American forces shot him and killed him. Then her other son came out, and they killed him."

Khochi, who was in the house at the time of the raid, said the security forces detained seven other men. He said many of the people staying in his house were government workers and that one of his slain nephews was a member of the local district council.

Another villager who witnessed the raid, Abdul Malik Abdul Rahimzai, denied the victims were insurgents and insisted the soldiers "attacked innocent people" who were unarmed.

The villagers marched with the bodies of the slain men to a key road that leads from the capital, Kabul, to Jalalabad in eastern Nangarhar province. They said they would not bury the bodies until the coalition released all of those detained and explained what information spurred the raid.

"It is not acceptable that they are coming and conducting night raids on the homes of innocent civilians," said Quasimullah, a villager who goes by only one name. "We want the president to put a stop to night raids as soon as possible."

A spokesman for the coalition declined to comment further on Tuesday's operations, saying they were in the process of gathering more information.

Under the deal signed between the U.S. and Afghanistan in April, Afghan forces are now supposed to conduct home searches and U.S. forces are allowed to enter private compounds "only as required or requested."

In Helmand province, NATO said a joint Afghan and coalition force detained a Taliban leader and several of his subordinates on Tuesday. It said he was the senior Taliban leader for the province's Kajaki district and was responsible for roadside bombings and suicide attacks, including one earlier this month on a district police building.