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Afghan civilian casualties caused by NATO-led force erode trust

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Repeating mistake and killing non-combatants by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) during operations against Taliban militants in Afghanistan would further damage the already strained relations between Afghan administration and the military alliance, local political analysts say.

In the latest of deadly mistakes in Afghanistan, the NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force ISAF had reportedly killed two children during a crackdown operation against Taliban militants in the southern Uruzgan province late last month.

The Australian troops serving within the framework of the NATO-led ISAF had reportedly killed the ill-fated teens, causing anger among the locals.

"Repeating such tragic mistakes, no doubt, disappoints the people and adversely affects their trust towards the NATO-led forces mission," Nazari Pariani, a political analyst and editor-in-chief of the local newspaper the Daily Mandegar, observed in an interview with Xinhua.

Although the alliance had offered apology and expressed regret over the tragic incident, the angry Afghans have been calling for punishment of those behind the erroneous offensive.

To calm down the Afghans' feeling, ISAF has apologized for the killing of the two children.

"It is with deep regret that the International Security Assistance Force announces that its forces were responsible for the unintended death of two young Afghan civilians during an operation Feb. 28 in Shahid-e Hasas District, Uruzgan Province," the ISAF said in a statement released here Saturday.

In the statement, the U.S. commander of some 100,000 strong NATO-led ISAF forces, General Joseph Dunford said, "I offer my personal apology and condolences to the family of the boys who were killed."

"I am committed to ensuring we do the right thing for the families of those we harmed, as well as for the community in which they lived. We take full responsibility for this tragedy," the top brass said in the statement.

The boys were killed when Coalition forces fired at what they thought were insurgent forces, the statement admitted, saying ISAF remains committed to taking appropriate actions to minimize the likelihood of similar occurrences in the future.

This is not the first time and will not be the last one that Afghan civilians are killed by the NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force, Afghan observers said.

The NATO-led forces erroneous attacks or the so-called friendly fire have claimed scores of Afghans lives from both civilians and military over the past decade which prompted President Hamid Karzai to criticize the alliance for its operations in Afghan villages.

In his latest criticism against the military alliance, the Afghan president accused the U.S. Special Forces unit of misconduct including harassing locals in the central Wardak province last week and ordered their eviction from the province within two weeks.

"Killing civilians especially the children by foreign troops would discredit both the government and NATO-led coalition troops at the eyes of Afghans and eventually enable Taliban outfit to recruit fighters from the affected families to avenge," Pariani said.

President Hamid Karzai, in a statement released by his office here Sunday has strongly condemned killing two non-combatants by the NATO-led forces air strike in Uruzgan province over weekend, saying the government of Afghanistan has repeatedly called on international troops to pursue terrorists beyond Afghan borders and not in Afghan villages.