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## Nine Boys and a War

By Amy Davidson

03/03/2011



Ten boys went out to gather firewood in a valley in Afghanistan on Tuesday. Only one came home; his name is Hemad, and this is what he had to say, as [quoted in the Times](#):

*We were almost done collecting the wood when suddenly we saw the helicopters come.... There were two of them. The helicopters hovered over us, scanned us and we saw a green flash from the helicopters. Then they flew back high up, and in a second round they hovered over us and started shooting. They fired a rocket which landed on a tree. The tree branches fell over me and shrapnel hit my right hand and my side.*

Hemad said that the branches hid, and so saved, him; that was a giving tree. Not so his friends: the people in the helicopter, he said, “shot the boys one after another.” Hemad is eleven years old. (So, as it happens, is my own child.) The others were between the ages of nine and fifteen; the nine-year-old wouldn’t even have been born when we went into Afghanistan, in 2001. One boy, who was fourteen, was the sole breadwinner for his mother and his dead father’s other wife, and his many sisters, according to an uncle. (The same man described what villagers found on the scene: “The head of a child was missing. Others were missing limbs.... We tried to find the body pieces and put them together. As it was getting late, we brought down the bodies in a rope bed.”)

The shooters in the helicopter, American troops based in the Pech district—but not for much longer; we have decided to give up on it—may not have been so much older. General Petraeus has already apologized for this incident, calling it a tragedy and saying that he’ll find out how things got mixed up (the helicopter was looking for whoever had fired on the about-to-be abandoned base). Maybe these things happen in wars, but that is why one needs to constantly wonder whether a war like this makes sense, what it’s for, where it’s headed, and whether we should just keep going when we can’t remember the answers to those questions.

Do we know the costs, or even understand our own losses? The [Washington Post](#) has a moving piece about Lieutenant General John Kelly and his son Robert, a lieutenant who was killed in Afghanistan when he stepped on a mine; Robert was twenty-nine. From the *Post*:

*“We are only one of 5,500 American families who have suffered the loss of a child in this war,” [General Kelly] said in an e-mail. “The death of my boy simply cannot be made to seem any more tragic than the others.”*

And yet those families, the ones with connections to the military, are increasingly isolated. This is one of Kelly’s concerns, the *Post* notes, which he expressed in a speech in St. Louis:

*“We are in a life-and-death struggle, but not our whole country,” he told the crowd. “One percent of Americans are touched by this war. Then there is a much smaller club of families who have given all.”*

*He spoke of the anger that some combat veterans feel toward the war’s opponents. “They hold in disdain those who claim to support them but not the cause that takes their innocence, their limbs and even their lives,” he said.*

*Later, he clarified in an interview that he is opposed to indifference, not dissent. “I just think if you are against the war, you should somehow try to change it,” he said. “Fight to bring us home.”*

That is a very reasonable injunction. (Another one, which Kelly sent to his son, in a letter before he died, was to not let his men “ever enjoy the killing or hate their enemy.... Combat is so inhumane; you must help your men maintain their humanity.”) The *Post* piece closes with General Kelly at a medal ceremony for one of his son’s men, who lost an arm in Afghanistan:

*Kelly watched from across the room. “They are kids,” he whispered. “Look at them. They are just kids.”*

Kids who maybe should get to come home.

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These children were not killed accidentally! When victims are beheaded and mutilated, this is an indication of intent and/or a very sick mind! In fact the whole idea of war in Afghanistan is sick because it is unnecessary, immoral and unwinnable! President Obama must share the blame as he continues the Bush legacy of imperialist warfare!

Posted 3/3/2011, 11:38:51am by PanchoValdez

Report abuseThis really must stop. If our soldiers are unable to distinguish unarmed children gathering firewood from taliban fighters, from helicopters no less, we have to give it up and come home. The longer we're there the more they'll hate us. This kind of military is useless for the tasks in Iraq and Aghanistan; all it can do is kill and destroy. If you want to create a stable society, win people over to your vision, win the 'hearts and minds', then sending in this US military is the worst thing you can do. Lighting up families at roadblocks, massacring wedding parties, dragging village elders out of their homes at night and shooting them in front of their children.... this has been going for what, 8-9 years? Do you think they love us yet? At least they should be grateful, right? It's obscene and horrible, the whole thing.

Posted 3/3/2011, 2:00:57am by Dvmx

Report abuseI don't know what more it's going to take. I protested the war before it even started. I've called every senator and representative. Polls show minority support for further warfare Yet the fiddlers fiddle in Washington, while the rest of the world burns, and Americans die overseas while bankrupting the US Treasury. Obama has the power, but doesn't want to end it, plain and simple. Congress no different.

Posted 3/3/2011, 1:06:47am by ackack

Report abuseWe should have been out by Feb 1, 2008, Coupled with the continued tax breaks for the wealthy. I probably will not vote in 2012. Tired of holding my nose. We libs were had.

Posted 3/2/2011, 11:47:33pm by doraglasberg

Report abuseNot only Bush & Cheney ... Obama & Bush holdover Gates have continued the same policies & practices. They're just as guilty now. No change there.

Posted 3/2/2011, 11:13:39pm by sloper

Report abuseHeart wrenching :( No wonder the rest of the world hates us. What warmonger Bush and Cheney have to done to the world and our country will never be forgotten by the coming generations.

Posted 3/2/2011, 10:50:13pm by siyengar