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Reuters

Afghan protester shot dead

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Crowds of men marched through the streets of Surkhrod district in Nangahar province, with slogans of "Death to Americans, Long Live the Taliban" and pelted stones at government buildings before they were fired on by police.



A man stands over the body of a dead civilian, protesters said had been killed during an overnight raid by NATO forces, during a demonstration in Surkhrod district, Nangarhar province May 14, 2010. In a statement NATO-led forces confirmed an overnight operation had taken place in the Surkhrod district but denied any civilians were killed and said they killed only insurgents, including a Taliban sub-commander.

Surkhrod - Police shot dead an Afghan protester in eastern Afghanistan on Friday after hundreds of villagers demonstrated against Nato raids which they said killed 11 civilians overnight, a local official said.

Crowds of men marched through the streets of Surkhrod district in Nangahar province, with slogans of "Death to Americans, Long Live the Taliban" and pelted stones at government buildings before they were fired on by police.

Haji Jamal, head of the local provincial council, said that one of the protesters had been shot dead by police gunfire. The interior ministry was not immediately available for comment.

The protest erupted after a Nato-led raid overnight in a village in Surkhrod district angered residents who said the raid killed innocent civilians.

So-called "night raids" on Afghan houses by foreign troops in the hours of darkness are a frequent source of friction between the Afghan government and the Nato-led The US and Nato commander, General Stanley McChrystal, has given instructions that night raids be carried out only as a last resort and with Afghan troops in the lead, to prevent incidents where Afghans defending their homes are mistaken for insurgents.



McChrystal has however refused to ban night raids outright, as requested by President Hamid Karzai. McChrystal's instructions say they can still be an effective and necessary tactic.

Nato-led forces said an overnight operation had taken place in Surkhrod district and that only insurgents had been killed, including a Taliban sub-commander, and no civilians had been harmed.

"Reports indicate no civilians were harmed during the operation," a Nato statement said. It did say how many people were killed.

Ali Khan, who lives next door to the homes which were raided, said he heard helicopters land at about 1am (2030 GMT).

"And then the gunshots started. We were terrified and we couldn't come outside," he said.

"Dozens of Afghan and foreign troops raided three homes and we found out in the morning that nine people were killed and two others are missing," Khan said.

Civilian casualties in the nine-year war have eroded support for foreign coalition forces trying to crush the Taliban insurgency and were one of the topics discussed between Karzai and US President Barack Obama last week.

Last year was the deadliest for Afghan civilians since the war started in 2001, according to the United Nations.

The Pentagon said US and Nato forces killed 90 civilians from January to April this year — a 76 per cent rise from the 51 deaths in the same period of 2009.