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As Afghanistan Rises in Revolt, America Sinks Further into Grave of Empires

By Tom Judd

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Thousands of Afghans have taken to the streets for the second day in northwestern Afghanistan to protest the killing of four people in a [night raid](#) by NATO forces this month. While many residents of the city of Taloqan (in addition to the local police force) claim that those killed were innocent, NATO has maintained that they were armed rebels. So far, protesters have stormed a military base and burned a police station.

Echoed by the media, Western forces have claimed that the protests have been infiltrated and hijacked by members of the Taliban. Whether this is true is dubious, and no proof has been provided. The smear of Taliban infiltration is used to de-legitimize the protest itself. The reality is that Afghan anger at the occupation of their country runs deep enough that thousands were willing to turn out two days in a row to protest the killings.

Protests in Afghanistan are frequent – just a few days before there was a protest in Nargahar province after a fifteen year old boy was [shot to death](#) in a housing raid. Last month saw tens of thousands of people [demonstrate against](#) the burning of the Qur'an by Florida pastor Terry Jones over five days. During these and many other protests there were vocal anti-occupation slogans and attacks on UN forces, soldiers and police.

Public anger in Afghanistan will be the death of the occupation, since it is public anger – over the murder of civilians, over the obliteration of villages by US air power, over the occupation itself – that drives the insurgency. As is consistently noted in articles covering the riots, while attacks by insurgents kill many more civilians than NATO raids and bombings, killings by

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NATO cause much more anger. Insurgencies are always larger than the people holding guns and planting explosives. On top of the twenty to twenty-five thousand Taliban militants (plus various other armed factions) there is a backbone of thousands more who provide shelter and material support to those fighters, who lie to coalition forces when they come into villages, and who turn a blind eye when prisoners are [escaping from jail](#).

The United States is not winning the battle for “hearts and minds,” that much is clear. In addition, the hearts and minds of the military occupying Afghanistan are being lost as well. The psychological and physical damages of the occupation and Obama’s troop surge are deep: soldiers facing mental health problems are at an [all-time high](#) - around twenty percent, and around eighty percent have seen a friend die in combat. The toll on soldiers is grim, and those who survive carry physical and mental wounds through multiple tours and back home.

With the assassination of Osama bin Laden, the United States and its dwindling allies in Afghanistan have a chance to exit Afghanistan with some sort of ‘Mission Accomplished’ message that could make people in the US feel like this wasn’t simply the tragic, costly war of aggression it actually is. However, this does not appear to be the path Washington is taking. The insurgency, at the head of which is the Taliban, is winning, yet the US has spent \$141 million dollars on a failed effort to bribe militants into laying down their weapons. This approach was much more successful in Iraq, where the resistance was more sectarian and less popular, but has not taken root in Afghanistan. Even Britain, America’s ever-obedient partner, has started to move towards withdrawing troops, though the US is doing [its best](#) to stop this. As the Taliban’s spring offensive heats up, we will see more of the same: more killings by NATO, more riots, and the US sinking deeper into the grave of empires.