

# EXECUTING HANDCUFFED AFGHAN KIDS?

DAVE LINDORFF



CounterPunch, March 4, 2010

**W**hen Charlie Company's Lt. William Calley ordered and encouraged his men to rape, maim and slaughter over 400 men, women and children in My Lai in Vietnam back in 1968, there were at least four Americans who tried to stop him or bring him and higher officers to justice. One was helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson Jr., who evacuated some of the wounded victims, and who set his chopper down between a group of Vietnamese and Calley's men, ordering his door gunner to open fire on the US soldiers if they shot any more people. One was Ron Ridenhour, a soldier who learned of the massacre, and began a private investigation, ultimately reporting the crime to the Pentagon and Congress. One was Michael Bernhardt, a soldier in Charlie Company who witnessed the whole thing, and reported it all to Ridenhour. And one was journalist Seymour Hersh, who broke the story in the US media.

Today's war in Afghanistan also has its My Lai massacres. It has them almost weekly, as US warplanes bomb wedding parties, or homes "suspected" of housing terrorists that turn out to house nothing but civilians. But these My Lais are all conveniently labeled accidents. They get filed away and forgotten as the inevitable "collateral damage" of war. There was, however, a massacre recently that was not a mistake--a massacre which, while it only involved fewer than a dozen people, bears the same stench as My Lai. It was the execution-style slaying of eight handcuffed students, aged 11-18, and a 12-year-old neighboring shepherd boy who had been visiting the others, in Kunar Province, on Dec. 26.

Sadly, no principled soldier with a conscience like pilot Hugh Thompson tried to save these children. No observer had the guts of a Michael Bernhardt to report what he had seen. No Ron Ridenhour among the other serving US troops in Afghanistan has investigated this atrocity or reported it to Congress. And no American reporter has investigated this war crime the way Seymour Hersh investigated My Lai.

There is a Seymour Hersh for the Kunar massacre, but he's a Brit. While American reporters like the anonymous journalistic drones who wrote CNN's December 29 report on the incident (<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/12/29/afghanistan.deaths/index.html>), took the Pentagon's initial cover story--that the dead were part of a secret bomb-squad--at face value, Jerome Starkey, a reporter in Afghanistan working for the Times of London and the Scotsman, talked to other sources--the dead boys' headmaster, other townspeople, and Afghan government officials--and found out the real truth about a gruesome war crime--the execution of handcuffed children. And while a few news outlets in the US like the New York

Times did mention that there were some claims that the dead were children, not bomb-makers, none, including CNN, which had bought and run the Pentagon's lies unquestioningly, bothered to print the news update when, on Feb. 24, the US military admitted that in fact the dead were innocent students. Nor has any US corporate news organization mentioned that the dead had been handcuffed when they were shot.

Starkey [reported](#) the US government's damning admission. Yet still the US media remain silent as the grave.

Under the Geneva Conventions, it is a war crime to execute a captive. Yet in Kunar on December 26, US-led forces, or perhaps US soldiers or contract mercenaries, cold-bloodedly executed eight hand-cuffed prisoners. It is a war crime to kill children under the age of 15, yet in this incident a boy of 11 and a boy of 12 were handcuffed as captured combatants and executed. Two others of the dead were 12 and a third was 15.

I called the Secretary of Defense's office to ask if any investigation was underway into this crime or if one was planned, and was told I had to send a written request, which I did. To date, I have heard nothing. The Pentagon PR machine pretended to me on the phone that they didn't even know what incident I was talking about, but without their "help" I have learned that what the US military has done--no surprise--is to pass the buck by leaving any investigation to the International Security Assistance Force--a fancy name for the US-led NATO force fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. It's a clever ruse. The ISAF is no more a genuine coalition entity than was George Bush's Iraq War Coalition of the Willing, but this dodge makes legislative investigation of the event impossible, since Congress has no authority to compel testimony from NATO or the ISAF as it would the Pentagon. A source at the Senate Armed Services Committee confirms that the ISAF is investigating, and that the committee has asked for a "briefing"--that means nothing would be under oath--once that investigation is complete, but don't hold your breath or expect anything dramatic.

I also contacted the press office of the House Armed Services Committee to see if any hearings into this crime have been planned. The answer is no, though the press officer asked me to send her details of the incident (Not a good sign that House members and staff are paying much attention--the killings led to country-wide student demonstrations in Afghanistan, to a formal protest by the office of President Hamid Karzai, and to an investigation by the Afghan government, which concluded that innocent students had been handcuffed and executed, and no doubt contributed to a call by the Afghan government for prosecution and execution of American soldiers who kill Afghan civilians.)

There is still time for people of conscience to stand up in the midst of this imperial adventure that may now appropriately be called Obama's War in Afghanistan. Plenty of men and women in uniform in Afghanistan know that nine Afghan children were captured and murdered at America's hands last December in Kunar. There are also probably people who were involved in the planning or carrying out of this criminal operation who are sickened by what happened. But these people are so far holding their tongues, whether out of fear, or out of simply not knowing where to turn (Note: If you have information you may contact me). There are also plenty of reporters in Afghanistan and in Washington who could be investigating this story. They are not. Don't ask me why. Maybe ask their editors.

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### **CounterPunch:**

<http://www.counterpunch.com/lindorff03042010.html>

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# SHOOTING HANDCUFFED CHILDREN

By David Swanson



January 3, 2010

The occupied government of Afghanistan and the United Nations have both concluded that U.S.-led troops recently dragged eight sleeping children out of their beds, handcuffed some of them, and shot them all dead. While this apparently constitutes an everyday act of kindness, far less intriguing than the vicious singeing of his pubic hairs by Captain Underpants, it is at least a variation on the ordinary American technique of murdering men, women, and children by the dozens with unmanned drones.

Also this week in Afghanistan, eight CIA assassins (see if you can find a more appropriate name for them) were murdered by a suicide bombing that one of them apparently executed against the other seven. The Taliban in Pakistan claims credit and describes the mass-murder as revenge for the CIA's drone killings. And we thought unmanned drones were War Perfected because none of the right people would have to risk their lives. Oops. Perhaps Detroit-bound passengers risked theirs unwittingly.

The CIA has declared its intention to seek revenge for the suicide strike. Who knows what the assassination of sleeping students was revenge for. Perhaps the next lunatic to try blowing up something in the United States will be seeking revenge for whatever Obama does to avenge the victims (television viewers?) of the Crotch Crusader. Certainly there will be numerous more acts of violence driven by longings for revenge against the drone pilots and the shooters of students.

In a civilized world, the alternative to vengeance is justice. Often we can even set aside feelings of revenge as long as we are able to act so as to deter more crime. But at the same time that the puppet president of Afghanistan is demanding the arrest of the troops who shot the handcuffed children, the puppet government of Iraq is facing up to the refusal of the United States to seriously prosecute the Blackwater assassins of innocent Iraqis. Justice will not be permitted as an alternative to vengeance -- the mere idea is anti-American.

No one so much as blinks at the CIA's avowal of vengeance for the recent suicide attack, never mind the illegality, because the entire illegal war on Afghanistan/Pakistan was launched and is still maintained as a pretended act of revenge for the crimes of 9-11. Of

course, we're not bombing the flight schools or the German and Spanish hotels. Of course , we admit that there are fewer than 100 members of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Of course we openly seek massive permanent bases and an oil pipeline. Of course, Obama's decisions are all electoral calculations computed by the calculus of cowardice. Of course, we're prosecuting the Butt Bomber as a criminal, just as we always used to prosecute criminals as criminals. Of course, revenge would not be a legal justification for war even if we could persuade ourselves it was a sane one. But the war is publicly understood as revenge, the resistance by its victims is understood as revenge, the escalation is understood as revenge for the resistance, and an eye for an eye slowly makes the whole world blind.

But here's what we've forgotten: nothing is ever remotely as horrible as war. So, nothing can ever constitute a justification for launching or escalating or continuing a war. Dragging children out of bed and killing them is not a freak blip in the course of a war. It is war reduced to a comprehensible scale. It's less war, not worse war. Everything we are spending our grandchildren's unearned pay on, borrowed from China at great expense, all of it is for the murdering of human beings. And it will remain so for eternity, no matter how many times you chant "Support Duh Troops."

I know many soldiers and mercenaries had few other options, given our failure to invest in any other industries. I know they've been lied to. I know they're scared and tired. But they wouldn't be there if we brought them home. And I support a full investment in their physical and mental and economic recovery. What I don't support is anyone participating in these wars, and that includes every single American who is not putting every spare moment into demanding that Congress stop forking over the money.

It's blood money. It's payment for murder. It cannot be defended. It cannot be permitted. We must [stop it now](#). We must [shut down](#) the place it comes from.

Not another dime. Not another dollar. Not another death. Not another thought of revenge.

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**By David Swanson**

Silly me. I thought I could comment on something that was in the news without proving that it was in the news. Maybe this will help:

## **[UN says Afghans slain in troop raid were students](#)**

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC, Associated Press Writer, Thu Dec 31, 1:26 pm ET  
[http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20091231/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/as\\_afghanistan\\_un](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20091231/ap_on_re_as/as_afghanistan_un)

KABUL – The United Nations said Thursday that a weekend raid by foreign troops in a tense eastern Afghan province killed eight local students and warned against nighttime actions by coalition forces because they often cause civilian deaths.

The Afghan government said its investigation has established that all 10 people killed Sunday in a remote village in Kunar province were civilians. Its officials said that eight of those killed were schoolchildren aged 12-14. . . .

UN special representative in Afghanistan Kai Eide said in a statement that the preliminary UN investigation showed "strong indication" that there were insurgents in the area at the time of the attack.

But, he added, "based on our initial investigation, eight of those killed were students enrolled in local schools." . . .

Eide said the UN remained concerned about nighttime raids by coalition troops "given that they often result in lethal outcomes for civilians, the dangerous confusion that frequently arises when a family compound is invaded." . . .

A statement issued Thursday by the Afghan National Security Directorate said the government investigation showed no Afghan forces were involved and "international forces from an unknown address came to the area and without facing any armed resistance, put 10 youth in two rooms and killed them.

**"They conducted this operation on their own without informing any security or local authorities of Afghanistan,"** the statement said.

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Associated Press writer Rahim Faiez in Kabul contributed to this report.

I've excerpted much of the above article, but not the military denials. Go read them at the link above. Here's the Los Angeles Times:

### **Western troops killed civilians, Afghan investigators say**

The government investigators say eight of those killed over the weekend in a remote eastern province were boys under 18. Western military officials say there is no evidence to back the claim.

By Laura King, Los Angeles Times, December 31, 2009

Reporting from Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan government investigators asserted Wednesday that foreign troops had killed 10 civilians in a raid this week, including eight students younger than 18. Western military officials called the charge unsubstantiated and urged a joint investigation. . . .

A statement from the presidential palace said Karzai had offered condolences to the families of the dead, and endorsed the initial findings of an investigative panel that had traveled to Kunar at his behest.

The head of the Afghan delegation, Asadullah Wafa, said 10 males, all civilians, were taken from their homes in Ghazikhan village, in the Narang district, and then shot dead by foreign troops. The report cited the village schoolmaster as identifying eight of them as pupils between the ages of 12 and 17. . . .

Wafa, a close aide to Karzai, suggested that an informant had provided misleading information to Western forces, triggering the strike. Afghan villagers have sometimes tried to settle scores with rival clans or tribes by falsely reporting insurgent activity to the authorities. . . .

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The above article has been dismissed by commenters on progressive websites because it was posted by the progressive website Common Dreams. Never mind that Common

Dreams has been right far more often than the Los Angeles Times. Below is a collection of sources put together (and presumably thereby tarnished) by Talking Points Memo:

## **[Afghan Children Handcuffed, Then Killed By American Soldiers](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/talk/blogs/r/u/rutabaga_ridgepole/2010/01/afghan-children-handcuffed-the.php)**

January 1, 2010, 7:38AM

Talking Points Memo

[http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/talk/blogs/r/u/rutabaga\\_ridgepole/2010/01/afghan-children-handcuffed-the.php](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/talk/blogs/r/u/rutabaga_ridgepole/2010/01/afghan-children-handcuffed-the.php)

TPM starts with the Times:

From the London Times, December 31, 2009...

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/Afghanistan/article6971638.ece>

President Karzai sent a team of investigators to Narang district, in eastern Kunar province, after reports of a massacre first surfaced on Monday.

"The delegation concluded that a unit of international forces descended from a plane Sunday night into Ghazi Khan village in Narang district of the eastern province of Kunar and took ten people from three homes, eight of them school students in grades six, nine and ten, one of them a guest, the rest from the same family, and shot them dead," a statement on President Karzai's website said.

Assadullah Wafa, who led the investigation, said that US soldiers flew to Kunar from Kabul, suggesting that they were part of a special forces unit.

Mr Wafa, a former governor of Helmand province, met President Karzai to discuss his findings yesterday. "I spoke to the local headmaster," he said. "It's impossible they were al-Qaeda. They were children, they were civilians, they were innocent. I condemn this attack."

In a telephone interview last night, the headmaster said that the victims were asleep in three rooms when the troops arrived. "Seven students were in one room," said Rahman Jan Ehsas. "A student and one guest were in another room, a guest room, and a farmer was asleep with his wife in a third building.

"First the foreign troops entered the guest room and shot two of them. Then they entered another room and handcuffed the seven students. Then they killed them."

Directly from Karzai's website...

[http://president.gov.af/Contents/91/Documents/1124/phone\\_talks\\_kunar\\_eng.html](http://president.gov.af/Contents/91/Documents/1124/phone_talks_kunar_eng.html)

President Karzai in a telephone contact expressed condolences and shared grief with the families of the victims of the recent attack in Kunar province.

Following the attack, President Karzai tasked a delegation on Monday led by the Chief of Complaints Commission and composed of representatives from the ministries of Defense, Interior, National Directorate of Security and the Office of Administrative Affairs for an immediate investigation of the incident.

The findings by the delegation concluded that a unit of international forces descended from

a plane Sunday night into Ghazi Khan Village in Narang district of the eastern province of Kunar and took 10 people from three homes, eight of them school students in grades six, nine and 10, one of them a guest, the rest from the same family, and shot them dead.

Eight of those shot dead were confirmed as school students by the village school principle.

From the New York Times...

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/29/world/asia/29afghan.html>

The governor of Kunar, Fazullah Wahidi, said that "the coalition claimed they were enemy fighters," but that elders in the district and a delegation sent to the remote area had found that "10 people were killed and all of them were civilians."

From the United Nations...

[http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34644227/ns/world\\_news-south\\_and\\_central\\_asia/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34644227/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/)

The United Nations said Thursday that a weekend raid by foreign troops in a tense eastern Afghan province killed eight local students and that it warned against nighttime actions by coalition forces because they often cause civilian deaths.

That last quote is simply from the same AP story I quoted above, but posted on the MSNBC website. The UN special representative, you'll recall, is named and quoted above.

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Villagers and relatives and parents of the victims are mourning. The woman seen in the photo is mother of three of the victims.



Villagers prepare graves for the civilians killed by US Special Forces in Narang district.



Attallah s/o Talib, student of class 9 in Narang High School.



Mutiullah s/o Talib, student of class 11 in Narang High School.



Abdul Khaliq s/o Abdullah, a poor peasant.



Subhanullah s/o Farooq, student of class 10 in Narang High School.



Atiqullah s/o Farooq, student of class 9 in Narang High School.



Samiullah s/o Abdullah Jan, student of class 6 in Badel Primary School.



Rahimullah s/o Talib, student of class 11 in Narang High School.



Najibullah s/o Abdullah Jan, student of class 10 in Narang High School.



These photos are taken in the crime scene by US troops right after killing the students in Narang district.



These photos are taken in the crime scene by US troops right after killing the students in Narang district.

**PHOTOS BY RAWA**

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