

## Team America Kills Five Kids in Marjah

Robert Naiman - [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org) - February 17, 2010



"Civilian casualties are inevitable," said US officials before launching their weekend military assault on Marjah in southern Afghanistan, and in this case, they were telling the truth. Yesterday, The New York Times [reported](#), a US rocket strike "hit a compound crowded with Afghan civilians ... killing at least 10 people, including 5 children."

What justification has been provided by the government of the United States for its decision to kill these five children?

It will be argued that the government of the United States did not decide to kill these five children *specifically*, and that's absolutely true. The US government did not decide to kill these particular children; it only decided to kill some Afghan civilians, chosen randomly from Marjah's civilian population, when it decided to launch its military assault. These five children simply had the misfortune of holding losing tickets in a lottery in which they did not choose to participate.

Recall the US government's [instructions to Marjah's residents](#) before the assault:

Afghan villagers should stay inside and "keep their heads down" when thousands of US Marines launch a massive assault on a densely-populated

district in coming days, NATO's civilian representative to Afghanistan said Tuesday.

[...]

NATO forces have decided to advise civilians in Marjah not to leave their homes, although they say they do not know whether the assault will lead to heavy fighting.

These five kids were staying inside, as instructed. It didn't save them from US rockets. Perhaps, they weren't keeping their heads down.

Having advised civilians to stay - helping ensure the area remained heavily populated during the offensive - US forces bore an extra responsibility to control their fire and avoid tactics that endanger civilians, Brad Adams of Human Rights Watch [told Reuters](#):

"I suspect that they believe they have the ability to generally distinguish between combatants and civilians. I would call that into question, given their long history of mistakes, particularly when using air power," Adams said.

"Whatever they do, they have an obligation to protect civilians and make adequate provision to alleviate any crisis that arises," he said. "It is very much their responsibility.... They are going to be carrying the can if this goes badly."

"Avoiding such civilian deaths ... has been a cornerstone of the war strategy" by General McChrystal, the Times informed us. If that's literally true, then McChrystal's strategy has failed spectacularly. But, perhaps, we're not meant to understand this statement literally. Perhaps, what this statement means is that McChrystal's strategy is to undertake the same military actions as before, and even to escalate them, but to change the rhetoric about them, in an effort to tamp down the outrage that might result from US actions.

It's not too late for the United States to change course. These five children are gone forever, but other children in Marjah can still be spared. [Tell President Obama and Congress to protect civilians in Marjah](#), as the United States is required to do by the laws of war.

If the United States cannot protect civilians from its military operations - as it is apparently either unable or unwilling to do - then the war should end. According to the repeated statements of senior US officials, the way that the war is going to end is through negotiations with the Afghan Taliban, so those negotiations should [commence immediately](#).

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