



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on March 12, 2012

## Murder of Civilians Puts Further Strain on U.S-Afghan Relations

The sergeant reportedly walked a mile from his base into the Panjwai district of Kandahar Province, where residents of three villages described the killer going from door to door and breaking into three houses. He eventually gathered 11 bodies, including four girls under the age of six, and set fire to them, they said.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the killings as an "inhuman and intentional act" and issued a statement demanding justice. Both President Obama and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta called the President to express condolences and promise thorough investigations. "This incident is tragic and shocking, and does not represent the exceptional character of our military and the respect that the United States has for the people of Afghanistan," Obama said in a White House statement.

The incident follows outrage and violence over the burning of copies of the Koran by American forces last month and by the earlier release of a video showing U.S. Marines urinating on the bodies of dead Afghan insurgents. It puts further strain on relations between the United States and Afghanistan, a country where U.S. and its NATO allies have been fighting al-Qaeda and Taliban forces for more than 10 years. While few al-Qaeda remain in the country, the Taliban continue their assaults on U.S. and NATO positions in an effort to drive out the foreigners and win back control of a country they ruled until U.S. and allied forces drove them from power in the fall of 2001, following the September 11 al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington. Afghanistan had been a haven for al-Qaeda and the site of some of its training camps prior to the attacks.

Sunday's killing spree is seen as a potential boost to the Taliban cause and a setback for U.S. plans to speed up the training of Afghan forces to take the lead in combat missions and to draw the Taliban into negotiations for an end to the fighting.

"The fear is that all these incidents, taken together, play into the Taliban's account of how we treat the Afghan religion and people," said an unnamed American military official, as quoted by the *Times*. "And while we all know that's a false account — think how many the Taliban have killed, and never once taken responsibility — it's a very hard perception to combat."

Meanwhile an Afghan government plan to abolish private security companies at the end of this month, along with the recent anti-American demonstrations and attacks, has left the private companies in a lurch and threatens billions of dollars invested in development projects. One company engaged in



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development work has lawyers investigating whether it can sue the United States for breach of contract, the *Times* reported. The situation leaves in doubt the Obama administration's plans for a continuing development mission after the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. troops and end of the NATO combat mission in 2014.

*Photo of victim of shooting spree: AP Images*



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