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In accepting General McChrystal's resignation, President Obama said that McChrystal's departure represented a change in personnel, not a change in policy. "Americans don't flinch in the face of difficult truths or difficult tasks," he stated, "We persist and we persevere." Yet, President Obama and the US people don't face up to the ugly truth that, in Afghanistan, the US has routinely committed atrocities against innocent civilians. By ducking that truth, the US reinforces a sense of exceptionalism, which, in other parts of the world, causes resentment and antagonism.

While on the campaign trail and since taking office, President Obama has persistently emphasized his view that attacks against civilians are always criminal, unless the US is the attacker, in which case they are justified. We heard this again, on June 23, as the president assured the US people that we will persevere in Afghanistan. "We will not tolerate a safe haven for terrorists who want to destroy Afghan security from within and launch attacks against innocent men, women, and children in our country and around the world."

When considering the security of Afghan civilians, it's crucial to ask why, on May 12, 2009, General McChrystal was selected to replace General McKiernan as the top general in Afghanistan. News reports said it was because he had experience in coordinating special operations in Iraq. That experience involved developing death squads, planning night raids and coordinating undercover assassinations. McChrystal proved, since his appointment, that he could organize atrocities against Afghan civilians and simultaneously present himself as a protector of Afghan civilians. In doing so, he relied on collaboration and cooperation from Defense Secretary Gates, General Petraeus and President Obama. They are united in their culpability.

We, ourselves, bear responsibility to examine disturbing patterns of misinformation regarding US/NATO attacks against Afghan civilians. In each of 11 incidents since April 9, 2009, US forces killed innocent civilians, then engaged in a coverup, insisting that they had killed insurgents, and, eventually, acknowledged having killed civilians. Generally, US/NATO officials issued an apology.

WikiLeaks is expected to release a video that establishes US responsibility for a May 4, 2009, air attack which killed an estimated 86 to 140 civilians, mostly women and children. In the days and weeks after the attack, US and NATO military officials made a concerted effort to avoid

blame for this attack.

Voices for Creative Nonviolence has maintained a list, assuredly only a partial list, of US/NATO attacks, since April 2009, which caused civilian deaths. Below is the entry describing the May 4, 2009, attack:

Date: May 4, 2009

Place

: Farah Province near the town of Granai

Circumstances

: Mainstream media reports estimate that between 86 and 140 people, mostly children, died in a US air attack. According to Reuters, only 22 of the victims were adult males.

Initial US/NATO response: The following chronology indicates multiple attempts on the part of US officials to avoid blame.

May 6, 2009

- US officials' plea ignorance and state that an [investigation](#) is under way.

May 6, 2009 - According to The Guardian, a spokesperson for US forces in Afghanistan, Captain Elizabeth Mathias says, "This was not coalition forces. This was Afghan national security forces who called in close air support, a decision that was vetted by the Afghan leadership,"

May 7, 2009

- An Armed Service Press Service report announces that a team is "investigating differing accounts of the events leading up to the casualties. Those accounts include allegations that the Taliban tossed grenades into homes to 'frame' Afghan and coalition forces." US Defense Secretary Robert Gates states that "the United States and coalition partners do everything we can to avoid civilian casualties." He goes on to say that "While there have been civilian casualties caused by American and NATO troops, they have been accidental. When the Taliban cause casualties, they are on purpose."

May 8, 2009

- Pentagon spokesperson Col. Greg Julian insists that earlier estimates of the death toll were "grossly exaggerated."

May 10, 2009

- In an interview with Mike Wallace, General David Petraeus suggests that the Taliban forced people "to remain in houses from which the Taliban was engaging us forces."

May 15, 2009

- Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Conway again

[blames](#)

the Taliban for civilian casualties. "We believe that there were families who were killed by the Taliban with grenades and rifle fire," he said, "that were then paraded about and shown as casualties from the airstrike."

US/NATO acknowledgement that the people killed were unarmed civilians:

May 13, 2009

- Referring to the May 4th raids in an Afghan press interview, Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry admitted that "there were a number of civilians killed, a number of civilians wounded. We don't know the exact amount. You are aware that our President of the United States and our Secretary of State and our Secretary of Defense have all very explicitly expressed their condolences for what happened."

June 2, 2009

- According to The New York Times "A military

[investigation](#)

has concluded that American personnel made significant errors in carrying out some of the airstrikes in western Afghanistan on May 4 that killed dozens of Afghan civilians, according to a senior American military official."

With all due respect for Ambassador Eikenberry's sincerity and recognizing that condolences may have been relayed to Afghanistan, we nevertheless want to say that we couldn't find any record of US officials publicly expressing sorrow, explicitly, for the US attack against Afghan civilians on May 4, 2009. However, we do note that US officials, one week later, nominated General McChrystal to replace General McKiernan. It seems that this appointment signaled US intent to shift assaults against Afghan civilians into the realm of undercover operations, making it much easier to duck the blame.