

December 11, 2008

U.S. Forces Kill 6 Afghan Police Officers by Mistake

By [KIRK SEMPLE](#)

KABUL, Afghanistan — United States forces killed six Afghan police officers and one civilian on Wednesday during an assault on the hide-out of a suspected [Taliban](#) commander, the authorities said, in what an American military spokesman called a “tragic case of mistaken identity.” Thirteen Afghan officers were also wounded in the episode.

A statement issued jointly by the American and the Afghan military commands said a contingent of police officers fired on United States forces after the Americans had successfully overrun the hide-out, killing the suspected Taliban commander and detaining another man.

The statement said the Americans had already entered the hide-out, a building in Qalat, the capital of the southern province of Zabul, when they came under attack by small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades from “a compound nearby.”

“Multiple attempts to deter the engagement were unsuccessful,” the statement said.

The Americans, concerned about women and children hiding in the building they had taken, returned fire using small arms and aircraft, the statement said.

After the firefight, the Americans discovered they had been shooting at Afghan police officers, the statement said.

But the deputy police chief of Qalat said the police officers had been in a police station when they came under American fire, which destroyed the station.

The official, Jailoni Khan Farahi, also said that the volley of bullets and grenades against the Americans had not originated from the police station but from a building nearby. He said he did not know who was occupying that building at the time.

While cases of Afghan security forces firing on coalition troops are rare, they have raised concerns in the American-led international force that insurgents may have infiltrated the Afghan Army and police force.

Zabul’s governor, Delbar Jan Arman, said a joint Afghan and American delegation of military and civilian officials was heading to the scene to investigate.

“Coalition forces deeply regret the incident of mistaken fire,” said Col. Jerry O’Hara, an American spokesman. “Initial reports indicate this was a tragic case of mistaken identity on both parts.”

Friendly-fire incidents between coalition soldiers and Afghan security forces have occasionally resulted in casualties, most often among Afghan police officers, who are not as well trained or equipped as the Afghan Army. But rarely have so many Afghan security personnel died in one episode.

In October, an airstrike in Khost Province by coalition forces killed nine Afghan soldiers and may have resulted from mistaken identity, American and Afghan officials said.

In June 2007, American forces called in air support when Afghan police officers opened fire on them during a hunt for Taliban militants. Seven Afghan policemen were killed.

Khalid Fazly contributed reporting.

Khalid Fazly contributed reporting.

[Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
