

$$m! = \frac{d}{dx} k_0 + \dots + k_{j-1} \frac{d^{j-1}}{dx^{j-1}} + \frac{1}{(j-1)!} \left(k_j - \frac{d}{dx} k_{j-1} + \dots + (-1)^{j-1} k_m \right) \frac{d^{j-1}}{dx^{j-1}} + \dots + \frac{(-1)^{m-j}}{(m-j)!} \frac{d^{m-j}}{dx^{m-j}} k_m$$

The international troops accuse the Taleban of using women and children as 'human shields', while the insurgents and increasingly also the Afghan government condemn the foreign forces for reckless disregard for human life.

But what reportedly happened in Toubé was quite different from the more detached, if horrific, bombing that has destroyed homes and families.

Abdul Mana'an's story is echoed by dozens of villagers from Toubé whom IWPR interviewed as they underwent treatment in Lashkar Gah or accompanied injured relatives there.

All spoke consistently of soldiers breaking down doors, shooting children and cutting throats. They agreed that the raid began at two in the morning with the sound of helicopters bringing in dozens of armed men, both Afghan and foreign.

One man called Nabi Jan told IWPR, 'At two in the morning on Sunday, foreign troops entered my house and shot my children in their cradles. I collected their scattered brains with my own hands and placed them near the bodies.'

'They killed 18 people that night. I swear none of them were Taleban fighters,' he said, his anger making his voice rise in tone. 'They killed civilians - people like me - with rough farmers' hands. If you don't believe me, then come with me to the cemetery. I will dig up the bodies to show you.'

According to Nabi Jan, the soldiers left at about five in the morning, when it was still dark. He and what is left of his family are now camped out by the river, in the winter cold, afraid to go home.

Borjan, a neighbour waiting in front of the Emergency Hospital in Lashkar Gah, confirmed the story.

'I was a witness,' he said. 'Soldiers came into our houses. They shot everyone they could find, including people asleep in bed. In one house, babies were shot in their cradles. Three people had their throats cut, but one survived, and he is now in this hospital.'

According to Borjan, the death toll was 17.

'Two of my cousins were killed in this attack,' said another man waiting outside the hospital, Noor Mohammad.

'It was nighttime and we heard aircraft. Soldiers came to our house. We hid and did not open the door, so they broke it down. When they entered the house, they began firing, and they killed four people. They were foreign and Afghan army troops. When they left, they gunned down anyone they could find.'

Garmseer lies about 70 km south of Lashkar Gah, on the border with Pakistan. The remoteness of its location and the porous nature of the frontier have ensured that this is one of the most unstable districts in an extremely troubled province.

The Taleban control most of the district except for a few government-held administrative centres, and clashes between the insurgents and the army are frequent.

Still, the stories about what happened in Toubé are exceptional, and the news spread quickly across Helmand by word of mouth, inflaming the mood. On November 20, a group of nearly 100 elders from the district came to Lashkar Gah to speak with government representatives at the offices of the Afghan National Security Directorate.

The emotionally charged meeting was attended by representatives of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, the joint military and civilian force tasked with providing security and rebuilding Helmand, operating under

the mandate of NATO's International Security Assistance Force, ISAF.

The elders demanded that foreign forces stay out of Garmseer and asked for military operations there to end.

'We hate the government and NATO because they kill our women and elders,' said one of the delegation, Khan Agha. 'They won't let us get on with our lives; they slaughter us.'

Khan Agha said he had turned against the Afghan National Army.

'It is bad enough that foreigners do these things, but now the Afghan army is with them. We are angry that even Afghans show us no sympathy. I used to cooperate with the army, but now, if I have an opportunity, I will do my best to hurt them,' he said.

One after another, the elders told their stories, all sounding remarkably similar.

'My name is Hajji Ali Mohammad,' said one old man, who was so hunched over that he could barely walk. Tears ran down his face as he spoke. 'It was during the night that armed men entered my house and shot two of my sons. One of them had just got married a month ago. My sons were not members of the Taleban, they were farmers. We are poor farmers.'

Mohammad Hussain Andiwai, the police chief for Helmand province, addressed the gathering at length. He said he would raise the Toubes' violence with international forces.

'I can feel your pain,' he told the elders. 'Even a heart of stone would melt with these sorrows. I will speak with the foreigners and make them promise not to kill civilians again like this.'

According to the PRT, the incident at Toubes is still being investigated.

'There was an operation [in Garmseer] about that time,' said one PRT official, speaking on condition of anonymity. 'And we were aware that allegations had been made. We found no evidence at the time to support these charges, but an investigation is ongoing.'

It may be difficult to pinpoint blame, assuming the accusations made by Toubes residents are substantiated.

Several military groups operate in Helmand, and not all of them answer to the British-led ISAF or follow its rules of engagement.

The United States-led Coalition also has soldiers in the province, and US Special Forces work with and mentor Afghan troops.

PRT officials were unable to comment on who is most likely to have been involved.

Most Helmand residents do not distinguish between British, American, Canadian, or Danish soldiers, using the term 'foreigner' for all.

Helmand's police chief cautioned against blaming foreigners for all of the province's troubles and called on the assembled elders to reflect on the terrible events of the past 30 years.

'Any time we have had hopes that our country would be rebuilt, that education would revive, or that we would have doctors, engineers, hospitals we get caught up in disaster. When the Russians were defeated, then commanders came from our own people and carried out evil acts,' he said, referring to the internecine strife between Afghan factions in the Nineties.

'Things took place in Kabul that were worse even than what happened

with the Russians. Who did these things? Were they British? Were they Dutch? Were they Americans? No, it was we who did them!?

Andiwal asked for cooperation from the elders in trying to resolve the problems.

?If you do not want things to improve, then two years from now there will be nothing left,? said Andiwal. ?Let us come to your villages, and we will listen to you and work with you.?

At this, an old man in the corner rose slowly to his feet. He leaned on a cane, shaking as he spoke.

?So this is our fault?? he said. ?You, the government, cannot maintain security. You have closed our schools. Many countries have come here, and they cannot do anything. So how can we??

[Back to Top](#)