

= Kandahar massacre =

The Kandahar massacre , more precisely identified as the Panjwai massacre , occurred in the early hours of 11 March 2012 , when United States Army Staff Sergeant Robert Bales murdered sixteen civilians and wounded six others in the Panjwayi District of Kandahar Province , Afghanistan . Nine of his victims were children , and eleven of the dead were from the same family . Some of the corpses were partially burned . Bales was taken into custody later that morning when he told authorities , " I did it " . On 23 August 2013 , a jury at Joint Base Lewis @-@ McChord in Fort Lewis , Washington sentenced him to life in prison without parole .

American and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) authorities apologized for the deaths . Afghan authorities condemned the act , describing it as " intentional murder " . The National Assembly of Afghanistan passed a resolution demanding a public trial in Afghanistan , but then @-@ U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said the soldier would be tried under U.S. military law . Bales pleaded guilty on 5 June 2013 to 16 counts of premeditated murder in exchange for the prosecution not seeking the death penalty . At the time of the plea , he stated that he did not know why he committed the murders .

United States authorities concluded that the killings were the act of a single individual . On 15 March 2012 , an Afghan parliamentary probe team made up of several members of the National Assembly of Afghanistan had speculated that up to 20 American soldiers were involved in the killings . The team later said they could not confirm claims that multiple soldiers took part in the killings .

= = Background = =

= = = The ' Surge ' in southern Afghanistan = = =

Panjwai is the birthplace of the Taliban movement and has traditionally been a stronghold of the Taliban . It has been an area of heavy fighting and was the focus of a military surge in 2010 , which brought a more than two @-@ fold increase in airstrikes , night raids into Afghan homes , insurgent casualties , and a six @-@ fold increase in special forces operations throughout Afghanistan . Fighting in Panjwai and adjacent Zhari , Arghandab and Kandahar districts was particularly intense . Conflict between the civilian population and U.S. forces was exacerbated by the wholesale destruction of some villages by American forces , mass arrests , murder of civilians by rogue units , and high casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) .

One of the families targeted in the Kandahar shootings had returned to the area in 2011 after previously being displaced by the surge . Fearing the Taliban but encouraged by the U.S. government , the Army , and the Afghan government , they settled near the American military base because they thought it would to be a safe place to live .

Approximately three weeks before the incidents , U.S. ? Afghan relations were strained by an incident where copies of the Quran were burnt at the Bagram Air Base . A couple of months before the shootings , U.S. Marines were videotaped urinating on dead Taliban fighters .

= = = Allegations of issues at Fort Lewis = = =

The shooter , Robert Bales , was based at Joint Base Lewis @-@ McChord (JBLM) . The primary medical treatment facility at the base , Madigan Army Medical Center , has come under investigation for downgrading diagnoses of soldiers with PTSD to lesser ailments . Military support groups around the base have alleged that base commanders did not give returning troops sufficient time to recover before sending them on further deployments , and that the base 's medical unit is understaffed and overwhelmed by the numbers of returning veterans with deployment @-@ related medical and psychological trauma .

Soldiers from the base have been linked to other atrocities and crimes . The 2010 Maywand District

murders involved JBLM @-@ based soldiers . Also in 2010 , a recently discharged AWOL soldier from JBLM shot a police officer in Salt Lake City . In April 2011 , a JBLM soldier killed his wife and 5 @-@ year @-@ old son before killing himself . In January 2012 , a JBLM soldier murdered a Mount Rainier National Park ranger . In two separate incidents , unrelated JBLM soldiers have been charged with waterboarding their children .

Jorge Gonzalez , executive director of a veterans resource center near Fort Lewis , said that the Kandahar killings offer more proof that the base is dysfunctional : " This was not a rogue soldier . JBLM is a rogue base , with a severe leadership problem " , he said in a statement . Base officials responded , saying that the crimes committed by its soldiers were isolated events which do not " reflect on the work and dedication of all service members . " Robert H. Scales , a retired U.S. Army major general and former commandant of the Army War College , suggested that the major factor in the shootings was the overuse of infantry personnel in the last ten years for close combat in Iraq , Afghanistan , and elsewhere .

= = = 8 March roadside bombing = = =

Residents of Mokhoyan , a village about 500 metres east of Camp Belamby , stated that a bomb had exploded in their vicinity on 8 March , destroying an armored vehicle and wounding several U.S. soldiers . They recounted that U.S. soldiers afterwards lined many of the male villagers against a wall , threatening to " get revenge for this incident by killing at least 20 of your people , " and threatening that " you and your children will pay for this " . One Mokhoyan resident told The Associated Press " It looked like they were going to shoot us , and I was very afraid . " American officials from The Pentagon declared that they had " no evidence " that villagers had been lined up against a wall and threatened in Mokhoyan . U.S. officials refused to confirm or deny that American soldiers were wounded outside the village on 8 March .

Bales ' lawyer , John Henry Browne , later stated that his client was upset because a fellow soldier had lost a leg in an explosion on 9 March . It is unclear whether the bombing cited by Browne was the same as the one described by the villagers .

= = Incident = =

= = = Killings = = =

According to official reports , Bales left combat outpost Camp Belamby at 3 : 00 a.m. local time wearing night vision goggles . Bales was wearing traditional Afghan clothing over his ISAF fatigues .

According to government officials with knowledge of the investigation , the killings were carried out in two phases , with Bales returning to base in between . An Afghan guard reported a soldier returning to base at 1 : 30 am , and another guard reported a soldier leaving at 2 : 30 am . Bales is believed to have first gone to Alkozai , about 1 / 2 mile north of Camp Belambay , then to Najiban (called Balandi in earlier reports) , located 1 1 / 2 miles south of the base . Four people were killed and six wounded in Alkozai , and twelve people were killed in Najiban . American sentries at the base heard gunshots in Alkozai , but did not take action besides attempting to view Alkozai from their post inside the base . Until 22 March , U.S. authorities recognized 16 people killed , including nine children , four men , and three women . On 22 March that number was revised to 17 , but later reduced back to 16 . It was initially reported that five others were injured , and that number was eventually increased to six .

Four members of the same family were killed in Alkozai . According to a 16 @-@ year @-@ old boy who was shot in the leg , Bales woke up his family members before shooting them . Another witness said she saw the man drag a woman out of her house and repeatedly hit her head against a wall .

The first victim in Najiban appears to have been Mohammad Dawood . According to Dawood 's brother , Bales shot Dawood in the head , but spared Dawood 's wife and six children after the wife screamed at him .

Eleven members of Abdul Samad 's family were killed in a house in Najiban village , including his wife , four girls between the ages of two and six , four boys between eight and twelve , and two other relatives . According to a witness , " he dragged the boys by their hair and shot them in the mouth " . At least three of the child victims were killed by a single shot to the head of each . Their bodies were then set on fire . Then another civilian , Mohammad Dawoud , age 55 , was killed in another house in this village . Witnesses reported that Bales was wearing a headlamp and / or a spotlight attached to his weapon .

Bales burned some of the victims ' bodies , an act considered desecration under Islamic law . Witnesses said that the eleven corpses from one family were shot in the head , stabbed , then gathered into one room and set on fire . A pile of ashes was found on the floor of one victims ' house ; at least one child 's body was found partially charred . A reporter for The New York Times inspected the children 's bodies taken to a nearby American military base and reported seeing burns on some of the legs and heads .

= = = Surrender and confession = = =

Following the events at Alkozai and Balandi , Bales handed himself over into ISAF custody . Afghan forces spotted him leaving his outpost before the killings and U.S. commanders on base assembled their troops for a head count when it was discovered that the soldier was missing . A patrol was dispatched to find the missing soldier , but did not find him before he returned to base after the killings . He was reportedly taken into custody without incident . There were no military operations being conducted in the area at the time of the shootings .

The surveillance video from the base reportedly shows " the soldier walking up to his base covered in a traditional Afghan shawl . The soldier removes the shawl and lays his weapon on the ground , then raises his arms in surrender . " The video has not been released to the public .

American investigators suspect that Bales may have departed the base before midnight , committed the murders in Alkozai , then returned to the base around 1 : 30 a.m. Bales may have then departed the base at 2 : 30 a.m. and committed the murders in Najiban . It was apparently the second departure which caused the alert and the commencement of the patrol to locate the missing soldier .

According to U.S. defense officials , upon his return to the base Bales said three words : " I did it " and then told individuals what happened . Later he retained a lawyer and refused to speak further with investigators . The United States flew Bales out of Afghanistan to Kuwait on 14 March 2012 , then to the United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas on 16 March . A Pentagon spokesman said the move was done because of a " legal recommendation " .

= = = The number of assailants = = =

According to U.S. authorities , a single soldier ? Staff Sergeant Robert Bales ? conducted the attack . The U.S. military showed Afghan authorities the footage from the surveillance video at the base as proof that there was only one perpetrator of the shootings .

According to Reuters , some neighbors and relatives of the dead saw a group of U.S. soldiers arrive at their village at about 2 a.m. , enter homes and open fire . " They were all drunk and shooting all over the place , " said neighbor Agha Lala . According to The New York Times , one of the attack 's survivors and " at least five other villagers " described seeing a number of soldiers , while some other Afghan residents described seeing only one gunman . One mother @-@ of @-@ six , whose husband was killed during the incident , reported involvement of a large number of people : " When they shot dead my husband , I tried to drag him into the house ... I saw more than 20 people when I looked out the house . The Americans pointed their guns at me and threatened me , telling me not to leave the house or they 'd kill me . " An eight @-@ year @-@ old girl named Noorbinak , whose father was killed reported that " one man entered the room and the others were standing in the yard , holding lights . " The brother of another victim claimed his nephews and nieces had seen " numerous soldiers " with headlamps and lighted guns . Some elected officials said that they

believed the attack was planned , claiming that one soldier could not have carried out such an act without help . In response , Afghan President Hamid Karzai appointed General Sher Mohammad Karimi to investigate the claims .

On 15 March 2012 , an Afghan parliamentary probe team made up of several members of the National Assembly of Afghanistan announced that up to 20 American soldiers were involved in the killings , with support from two helicopters . They had spent two days in the province on site , interviewing the survivors and collecting evidence . One of the members of the probe team , Hamizai Lali , said : " We closely examined the site of the incident , talked to the families who lost their beloved ones , the injured people and tribal elders ... The villages are one and a half kilometre from the American military base . We are convinced that one soldier cannot kill so many people in two villages within one hour ... [the victims] have been killed by the two groups . " Lali asked the Afghan government , the United Nations and the international community to ensure the perpetrators were punished in Afghanistan . While visiting one of the affected villages , Hamid Karzai pointed to one of the villagers and said : " In his family , in four rooms people were killed ? children and women were killed ? and then they were all brought together in one room and then set on fire . That , one man cannot do . " However , the team later said they could not confirm that multiple soldiers took part in the killings .

= = = Financial payments to victims ' families = = =

On 25 March 2012 at the office of the governor of Kandahar province , the United States gave the equivalent of US \$ 860 @,@ 000 to the victims ' families , allocated as \$ 50 @,@ 000 for each person killed and \$ 10 @,@ 000 for each person injured . The official who disbursed payments to the families said the money was not compensation , but rather the U.S. government 's offering to help the victims and their families . A member of the Kandahar provincial council described the payments as assistance , but not as the kind of legal compensation that would absolve the accused .

= = Robert Bales = =

The Army concluded that Robert Bales , a 38 @-@ year @-@ old U.S. Army staff sergeant stationed at Camp Belambay , was the only person responsible for the shootings . According to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta , immediately after being captured , Bales acknowledged the killings and " told individuals what happened " . He then asked for an attorney and refused to speak with investigators about his motivations .

According to officials , Bales may have been having marital problems , and the investigation of the shootings is looking into the possibility that an e @-@ mail about marriage problems might have provoked Bales . His wife wrote on her blog about her disappointment after he was passed over for a promotion to Sergeant First Class (E @-@ 7) . The family was also struggling with finances , and three days before the shootings Bales ' wife put their home up for sale , as they had fallen behind with mortgage payments .

On 23 March 2012 , the U.S. government charged Bales with 17 counts of murder , six counts of attempted murder , and six counts of assault . On 24 March 2012 , American investigators said they believe Bales split the killings in the villages of Balandi and Alkozai into two attacks , returning to Camp Belamby after the first attack before slipping out again an hour later . No other U.S. military personnel were disciplined for having any role in the incident .

On 22 August 2013 , Bales pleaded guilty at his General Court @-@ martial , apologized for his killing spree , and described the massacre as an " act of cowardice . " The plea spared Bales from the death penalty . On 23 August 2013 , Bales was sentenced to life in prison without parole by the court . He was also demoted to Private (E @-@ 1) , the lowest possible rank , dishonorably discharged , and ordered to forfeit all pay and allowances . A commanding general overseeing the court @-@ martial has the option of reducing the sentence to life with the possibility of parole . Afghan villagers and the families of Bales ' victims were upset by the decision , saying he deserved

death .

= = Reactions = =

= = = Reaction from family members and Afghan society = = =

A woman who lost four family members in the incident said , " We don 't know why this foreign soldier came and killed our innocent family members . Either he was drunk or he enjoyed killing civilians . " Abdul Samad , a 60 @-@ year @-@ old farmer who lost eleven family members , eight of whom were children , spoke about the incident : " I don 't know why they killed them . Our government told us to come back to the village , and then they let the Americans kill us . " One grieving mother , holding a dead baby in her arms , said , " They killed a child , was this child the Taliban ? Believe me , I haven 't seen a two @-@ year @-@ old member of the Taliban yet . "

" I don 't want any compensation . I don 't want money , I don 't want a trip to Mecca , I don 't want a house . I want nothing . But what I absolutely want is the punishment of the Americans . This is my demand , my demand , my demand and my demand , " said one villager , whose brother was killed .

More than 300 Panjwai locals gathered around the military base to protest the killings . Some brought burned blankets to represent those killed . In one house , an elderly woman screamed : " May God kill the only son of Karzai , so he feels what we feel . " On 13 March , hundreds of university students protested in Afghanistan 's eastern city of Jalalabad , shouting " Death to America ? Death to Obama " and burning effigies of the U.S. president and a Christian cross . On 15 March about 2 @, @ 000 people took part in another protest , in the southern province of Zabul .

= = = Reaction from Afghan authorities = = =

The President of Afghanistan , Hamid Karzai , called the incident " intentional murder " and stated " this [was] an assassination , an intentional killing of innocent civilians and cannot be forgiven . " He said the United States must now pull back its troops from village areas and allow Afghan security forces to take the lead in an effort to reduce civilian deaths . On 16 March Karzai said the U.S. was not fully co @-@ operating with a probe into the killings . He also said the problem of civilian casualties at the hands of NATO forces " has been going on for too long ... It is by all means the end of the rope here " . A spokesperson for the Afghan Interior Ministry condemned the act " in the strongest possible terms . "

Afghan politicians wanted Bales to face an Afghan court . The National Assembly of Afghanistan insisted that the U.S. soldier be put on public trial in Afghanistan : " We seriously demand and expect that the government of the United States punish the culprits and try them in a public trial before the people of Afghanistan . " It also condemned the killings as " brutal and inhuman " and declared that " people are running out of patience over the ignorance of foreign forces . " Abdul Rahim Ayobi , a member of parliament from Kandahar , said the shooting " gives us the message that now the American soldiers are out of the control of their generals . " Kamal Safai , a member from Kunduz , said that while it was the act of a single man , " the public reaction will blame the government of America , not the soldier . "

= = = Reaction from U.S. and NATO = = =

American and ISAF forces apologized and promised a full investigation , with Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stating that the soldier " will be brought to justice and be held accountable " and that the death penalty " could be a consideration . " U.S. president Barack Obama called the incident " absolutely tragic and heartbreaking " but noted that he was " proud generally " of what U.S. troops have accomplished in Afghanistan . Obama said the incident did not represent the " exceptional character " of the American military and the respect that the United States had for the people of

Afghanistan . On 13 March , he said , " the United States takes this as seriously as if it were our own citizens and our own children who were murdered . We ? re heartbroken over the loss of innocent life . The killing of innocent civilians is outrageous and it ? s unacceptable . " In response to a reporter asking whether the killings could be likened to the 1968 My Lai massacre of civilians by U.S. forces in South Vietnam , Obama replied , " It 's not comparable . It appeared you had a lone gunman who acted on his own . "

General John R. Allen , commander of the ISAF , issued an apology as well . Adrian Bradshaw , the deputy commander of the NATO forces in Afghanistan , apologized " I wish to convey my profound regrets and dismay ... I cannot explain the motivation behind such callous acts , but they were in no way part of authorised ISAF military activity . " A " rapid and thorough " inquiry was promised . U.S. officials said the killings would not affect their strategies in the area .

= = = Response from the Taliban = = =

The Taliban said in a statement on its website that " sick @-@ minded American savages " committed the " blood @-@ soaked and inhumane crime . " The militant group promised the families of the victims that it would take revenge " for every single martyr " . The Taliban also accused Afghan security officials of being complicit in the attack . The militant group called off peace talks in the wake of the deadly rampage . On 13 March , the Taliban launched an attack on an Afghan government delegation which was visiting the site of the killings , killing one government soldier and injuring three .