

## Danish Siddiqui, Reuters Photojournalist, Is Killed in Afghanistan

The Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer was killed in a clash between Afghan forces and the Taliban.

By Christina Goldbaum and Fahim Abed

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KABUL, Afghanistan — The Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Danish Siddiqui was killed while covering a clash between Afghan security forces and the Taliban on Friday, as fighting between the insurgents and government troops intensifies across the country.

Mr. Siddiqui, an Indian national and Reuters staff journalist, was embedded with members of Afghanistan's elite special forces in the southern province of Kandahar, a former Taliban stronghold. He was killed on Friday morning when Afghan commandos, trying to retake a district surrounding a border crossing with Pakistan, came under Taliban fire, according to Reuters.

"We are urgently seeking more information, working with authorities in the region," Michael Friedenberg, the president of Reuters, and Alessandra Galloni, the news agency's editor in chief, said in a joint statement. "Danish was an outstanding journalist, a devoted husband and father, and a much-loved colleague. Our thoughts are with his family at this terrible time."



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Reuters

Mr. Siddiqui, 38, had been a Reuters journalist since 2010 and covered events across Europe, Asia and the Middle East, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In recent years, he had earned a reputation among his peers in India for capturing some of the most powerful pictures of a turbulent time in the country and the region surrounding it.

In 2018, he was part of a Reuters team awarded the Pulitzer Prize for feature photography for coverage of the Rohingya refugee crisis. His images of families fleeing on rickety boats to Bangladesh from neighboring Myanmar, where the military was conducting a campaign of ethnic cleansing, were printed in newspapers around the world.

Mr. Siddiqui is the first foreign reporter to be killed in the Afghan conflict since U.S. and international forces began withdrawing from the country in May and the Taliban began a sweeping military offensive, killing hundreds of government troops and displacing tens of thousands of civilians. In just over two months, the insurgents have seized around 170 of the country's roughly 400 districts — only a handful of which have been retaken by government forces.

The Taliban offensive has largely focused on rural districts. But since early July, the insurgents have seized a string of important towns along Afghanistan's borders with Iran, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, and have pushed their way into four provincial capitals. Last week, the Taliban penetrated Kandahar city, Afghanistan's second largest city, and this week captured an important border crossing with Pakistan, Spin Boldak, in Kandahar Province.

Mr. Siddiqui had been embedded with the Afghan commandos in Kandahar in recent days to report on their efforts to retake parts of the province, according to Reuters. In a series of Twitter posts on Tuesday, Mr. Siddiqui described a rescue mission where commandos tried to save a police officer trapped by Taliban insurgents on the outskirts of Kandahar city.



A photograph taken by Mr. Siddiqui on Tuesday while embedded with Afghan commandos in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Danish Siddiqui/Reuters

"I could feel the tension in the air as A.S.F. were expecting an imminent attack from the Taliban," he wrote, referring to the Afghan special forces. "There was sporadic machine gun fire, but all hell broke loose as the Humvees reached the extraction point."

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Taliban insurgents fired on the commandos' convoy, he said. A video he posted shows the bright yellow and orange flash of a rocket-propelled grenade hitting the armored plating of the Humvee in which he was riding.

On Friday morning, as Afghan commandos began the operation to retake lost ground in the Spin Boldak district they met with Taliban resistance, according to Reuters.



Rohingya refugees along the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh in 2017. Mr. Siddiqui was part of a Reuters team that won the Pulitzer Prize for feature photography in 2018. Danish Siddiqui/Reuters

Mr. Siddiqui and several members of the Afghan security forces — including an Afghan special forces commander, Sadiq Karzai — were killed in the fighting, local officials said.

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Mr. Siddiqui's death comes at a particularly dangerous moment for journalists in the country. The United Nations estimates that 65 journalists, media professionals and human rights defenders were killed in Afghanistan from January 2018 to January 2021. Since peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban began last year, attacks on journalists have sharply increased, according to a recent Human Rights Watch report.

After the news of Mr. Siddiqui's death, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee urged journalists covering the conflict to take all necessary precautions and called on the Taliban and government forces to ensure their safety.

Tributes to the photographer flooded social media.

"From humanitarian crises to life-threatening violence, Danish Siddiqui has captured some of the most iconic, defining photographs of the last decade," Fatima Khan, a correspondent for The Print India, said on Twitter.



Mr. Siddiqui documented the scale of the coronavirus's impact in India by photographing fields of funeral pyres. Danish Siddiqui/Reuters

This spring, Mr. Siddiqui photographed the devastation the coronavirus wreaked across his home country of India. His haunting, almost post-apocalyptic, photos of crowded cremation grounds were credited widely around the world as the gauge of the devastation while the Indian government tried to downplay the crisis.

The year before, his work was at the center of news coverage after Prime Minister Narendra Modi amended the country's citizenship laws in a way that was seen as discriminatory toward Muslims and protests erupted in India. Mr. Siddiqui's photograph of a teenage right-wing activist brandishing a pistol at protesters, and opening fire as a row of police officers stood behind him, was broadly circulated as evidence of the emboldening of Hindu nationalists in India.

"What he did really, really well was he found those people, he found those faces through which to tell the story, to make you feel something," said Rahul Bhatia, a former Reuters colleague. "Because after a certain point you are inured to all the stuff that goes on around you in this country. What he did, by presenting you a face, was to show the sheer scale of the ordeal."

Mr. Siddiqui is survived by a wife and two children, according to a Reuters colleague in Delhi.

Mujib Mashal contributed reporting from New Delhi, and Taimoor Shah from Kandahar, Afghanistan.