

May 13, 2007

## War in Iraq takes toll on civilians

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The Associated Press reports that 21 civilians "including women and children" were killed when U.S. and Afghan troops called in an air strike against insurgents hiding in various homes. The coalition forces had been fighting the insurgents and knew precisely where they were, and it is highly probable that they knew there were likely to be civilians in jeopardy. The report appears to rationalize the problem.

The tragedy of accidental civilian deaths and injury is obvious to most people. But what the AP report fails to mention is that for every civilian killed, injured, or whose property is destroyed, there will be a number of insurgent sympathizers created.

Counterinsurgency is not a war of firepower and attrition. It is predominantly an effort to wrest popular support away from the insurgents and its success relies upon the provision of safety and security to local residents. We will never win popular support away from the insurgents if we are not cautious in our application of force in the presence of civilians.

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