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Demands U.S. "Consider Moving the Targeting of Leadership Positions...Away from Populated Areas"

Another Lecture From Christiane Amanpour

Thousands of innocents died during years of civil war in Afghanistan, but those deaths didn't roil the Islamic world. Relatively few civilians have been killed by stray U.S. bombs since Oct. 7 — a death count wildly inflated by the Taliban in its propaganda effort to somehow prove the perverted and preposterous view that America is at war not with terrorism, but with Islam itself.

In an interview this afternoon with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, shown both in the U.S. and around the world on CNN's international network, CNN's Christiane Amanpour pushed the notion that our conduct has stoked legitimate grievances with America, even recommending that the U.S. create safe havens for terrorists by declaring "population areas" off limits to bombing.

Amanpour told Rumsfeld that "despite a lot of rhetoric in this region, we have, from our own reporting, detected a discernable support in some quarters, even in Afghanistan, for the goal of the bombing campaign — amongst Afghan exiles, amongst people in Afghanistan, those opposed to the Taliban. But recent reports and pictures of civilian casualties are beginning to shift that support." Offering her own alternative military strategy, she continued: "In order to reverse that trend, would you consider moving the targeting of leadership positions that you have been targeting from populated areas where, inevitably, there are likely to be civilian casualties, would you consider shifting that targeting to, for instance, ground forces on the front lines away from populated areas?"

After Rumsfeld replied the bombing has been "very measured, very careful," and was focused "totally" on military targets, Amanpour tried again: "Mr. Secretary, as I said, we did discern support for the goal of these air strikes among some in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but I'm asking you, are you concerned that the civilian casualties — which you, yourself, have even spoken about in terms of some missed targeting, some missed hits — we've seen, you know warehouses, we've seen certain civilian dwellings, that you, yourself, have acknowledged. Are you concerned about a

shift, which we're hearing about, in public support?"

She then tried to argue that anti-Americanism was due to the failure of U.S. public relations, not the misleading statements of our enemies. "You've said over and over again, and so have all of the leaders of this coalition, that this is not a war against Islam but one against terrorism. But as you know, there are very loud voices in this region who are saying exactly the opposite, that this is in fact, they claim, a war against Islam," Amanpour told Rumsfeld. "Are you concerned that you have been slow in getting your message out to the Moslem world?"

Meanwhile, Back on the Web Site...

"Afghans from the eastern province of Nagrahar tell CNN that the Taliban exaggerated reports of civilian casualties in a bombed-out village they displayed to a group of international journalists Sunday."

— Report posted on CNN's Web site, October 18.

Finally, Amanpour counseled that the U.S. was suspect in the eyes of many because it hadn't shown "empathy for the poverty and the misery" of Palestinians: "In this part of the world, people, Moslems, feel that the United States has not shown similar empathy for the poverty and the

misery of the Palestinian cause. In this part of the world, that is a litmus test, and they make — they make — a link between the Palestinian cause, and the perceived lack of empathy and the claim — the claim — that Osama bin Laden makes to represent their cause. Now, I know you do not think, nor do most people think, that link is justified. But do you accept that America has a long-term problem with this kind of perception in the Moslem world unless that issue is dealt with and resolved?"

Earlier today, Amanpour showed a Taliban official who charged the U.S. with killing hundreds of "children, women, old men and men." Following his rant, she noted "we certainly cannot confirm the numbers that the deputy ambassador is referring to. There have been reports of civilian casualties and we have also had reports from the Pentagon that they are targeting military installations and Taliban ground troops." How even-handed, that delicate balancing of Taliban lies with truthful "reports." — Rich Noyes

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