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Real civilians help British soldiers train to fight Taliban Afghani village built in UK to train troops



Britain has 8,300 soldiers currently operating in Afghanistan (File)

LONDON (Mohamed Shebaro)

The smell of traditional dishes and villagers going about their day may sound like a typical day in Afghanistan but it is an odd sight in the British countryside where a mock village has been set up as a training field for soldiers headed to the war-torn country.

At first glance the village appears to be in the middle of the Afghanistan but it is a far cry from the hot desert country and is based in the green countryside of Norfolk, northeast of London, where army cars patrol as villagers run their bazaar stalls and communicate in Pashto.

The mock village, Sindh Kalay, is a replica of a real village in the Helmand province, and set the Ministry of Defense back around \$20 million. More than 10,000 soldiers will use the village as a training ground before they travel to Afghanistan to join the U.S.-led fight against the Taliban.

"The training soldiers get in the village is very crucial because it is an exact replica of reality," Colonel Richard Wesley, the village's commanding officer, told Al Arabiya.

"There are various training exercises and they change according to the Taliban's new and improved tactics. For example, regular patrols are carried out in markets to intercept any possible terrorist attack in crowded areas," Wesley explained.

"Real" civilians

Around 70 "villagers" are tasked with going about their daily business as they would if they were in their hometown, which helps soldiers quickly adapt to the Afghani environment, Fazel Baria, the village supervisor, told Al Arabiya.

"The presence of civilians trains officers to come up with new strategies to protect them against any imminent danger and to save them in case of terrorist attack," he explained.

"You can even smell Afghani food while walking in the streets," Baria told Al Arabiya. "This adds to the authenticity of the experience."

Civilians in the mock village are sometimes tied up by military personnel and have their houses searched in case they are suspected of hiding Taliban fighters.

The Ministry of Defense said a British soldier in Afghanistan was killed last week after a bombing that targeted a military patrol in the southern province of Helmand.

This puts the number of dead British soldiers at 169 since the start of the war on Afghanistan in 2001.

According to the ministry, the number of British troops currently in Afghanistan reached 8,300 as part of the NATO forces.

(Translated from Arabic by Sonia Farid)