

Australian SAS planted weapons on murdered civilians in Afghanistan

By Taylor Bennington
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The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has revealed further evidence leaked from a nearly completed closed-door inquiry of systematic war crimes carried out by elite Australian Special Air Services (SAS) in Afghanistan.

The revelations include that SAS military rotations in 2012 and early 2013 planted weapons on the bodies of civilians they had murdered, in an attempt to cover their tracks. This was done so crudely that the same distinctively marked weapon was planted multiple times.

The official inquiry is being carried out by Paul Brereton, a New South Wales Supreme Court Justice and army reserve Major General, and has lasted four years. Brereton has reportedly conducted over 250 interviews and looked into at least 55 alleged war crimes incidents between 2005 and 2016.

The latest ABC report detailed an SAS raid on Shina Village in May 2012. Two civilians were shot dead by Australian troops and then presented as Taliban “insurgents” by photographing their corpses alongside an AK-47 assault rifle. The same weapon, which had teal tape wrapped around the stock, was used for both civilians, an elderly man in his 80s and a young mentally ill man. A third Afghan killed in the raid was the imam of the local mosque, Muhibullah.

Shina villager Abdul Wali told an Afghani journalist that his elderly father, Abdul Wahid, was unarmed and killed in cold blood. “[My father] was on his own land. He never stole or did anything bad to anyone,” he said. “This is impossible to forgive.”

Jan Mohammad was the young, mentally ill man killed in the SAS raid. Sahki Daad, the victim’s brother-in-law, gave an account of the killing, saying 20-year-old Jan Mohammad was tending a grazing cow when the SAS approached the village.

“When the cow heard the helicopters, it ran and he ran after it,” Daad explained. The “soldiers came his way... and saw him running.” He continued, “they shot him straight away in the head.”

Several SAS soldiers who served in the 2012 Afghanistan rotation told the ABC that the framing of unarmed civilians as Taliban insurgents, with planted radios or weapons, which were known as “throwdowns” within the ranks, “happened on numerous occasions.”

In January 2013, an SAS squad was commanded to sweep the village of Nawjoy to find and kill an alleged Taliban target named Mawlawi Sher Mohammad. Merely an identification by name constituted the validation of carrying out this assassination. The Australian SAS soldiers located Mawlawi as he was congregating with several women, ripped him away, and shot him dead. Nawjoy villager Ghafoor Jan, the victims’ brother-in-law, told journalists, “Mawlawi was an innocent man... He had no links at all with the Taliban.”

Chapman revealed soldiers were “most of the time [given] a really simple description of the average Afghani man.” He explained: “Often... they would be saying stuff like ‘Fist-length beard, wearing Afghani clothes’.”

Further crimes were committed following the assassination of Afghani citizen Mawlawi Sher Mohammad. Ghafoor Jan told journalists the soldiers “burned people’s motorbikes and one car.” He added: “They burned them because they thought the vehicles belonged to the Taliban. But they were the property of the villagers.”

Another massacre of civilians in Afghanistan occurred toward the end of 2012. An Australian military raid on Sara Aw in December resulted in “up

to 10 suspicious killings with another five Taliban dead,” the ABC reported. At least five of these suspicious killings occurred at a villager’s tractor where there were no weapons found on the victims.

Afghan villager Mohammad Nassim, who witnessed the attack, told journalists that “there were three Taliban in nomad houses [near the village]. They resisted and were killed. But then they killed other people—civilians.”

Witness and fellow villager Ratmahullah said Australian soldiers “were shooting people intentionally. They were mass shooting.”

Abdul Qadas, who got injured during the raid, said his brother Abdul Salim was driving the tractor when he was killed. “He was carrying a load of onions; he was taking them to the city. There were some other people with him as well.” Abdul Qadas’s cousin was also killed in the attack while packing onions.

According to the ABC, the SAS were accompanied by Afghan special forces in the operation. It added that “the Zulu 1 [SAS] patrol was involved in shooting at the tractor... and that some members of the SAS patrol were unhappy about what happened.”

This is considered to be the worst day of civilian killings yet uncovered by the official investigation into Australian war crimes in Afghanistan.

Special Forces commander Adam Findlay revealed the investigation arose from the concerns of SAS soldiers writing letters to the upper stratum about misconduct. The number of individuals who have given evidence to the four-year long inquiry currently exceeds 300.

The ABC published photos of Australian soldiers on a mission in Afghanistan waving a US Confederate flag with the inscription “southern pride.” These featured in a “highlights video” edited by several SAS soldiers following their rotation of Afghanistan in 2012. The presence of fascistic elements within the SAS is well documented. In 2007 Australian soldiers flew a Nazi swastika flag above a vehicle while on patrol in Afghanistan.

The individual war crimes carried out in the past two decades flowed inexorably from the primary war crime—the invasion and neo-colonial occupation to advance the geopolitical and economic interests of the United States and its allies.

The criminal violence inflicted on the occupied

people of Afghanistan since 2001 represents an indictment of the entire ruling class in Australia.

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