Following closed door trial:

Karzai orders first state execution in Afghanistan

James Conachy
7 May 2004

The first official execution in Afghanistan since the US overthrow of the Taliban regime was carried out in secret on April 19. On the signed orders of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Abdullah Shah was taken from his cell in Kabul to a prison on the outskirts of the city and shot in the back of the head. His family only learned of his death three days later. According to his cousin, Shah's nose appeared to have been broken "by something like a rifle butt," suggesting he was beaten before being killed.

The state murder of Abdullah Shah, and the circumstances leading to it, underscores the thoroughly reactionary character of the regime the Bush administration has installed over the Afghan people. According to evidence assembled by Amnesty International, Shah's sentencing and execution was carried out in flagrant violation of human rights and due legal process and may well have been motivated by a desire to silence him.

Shah was charged with 20 counts of murder and sentenced to death after three trials by a special court in October 2002. The Afghan regime alleged he was an underling of a militia commander known as Zardan, who controlled the Paghman district of Afghanistan—near Kabul—in the early 1990s on behalf of the warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar is currently opposing the US presence in Afghanistan and his party, Hezb-i-Islami, has been proscribed by the Bush administration as a terrorist organisation.

Shah was allegedly nicknamed "Zardan's Dog" due to his brutality. Prosecutors claimed he was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people. Thirteen people testified that Shah had murdered their relatives. Among other charges laid against him were the murder of one of his wives and his baby daughter. Another of his wives testified against him, accusing of him of trying to burn her to death.

The trials, however, were a travesty of justice—both for Shah and for the alleged victims of his crimes. The Afghan government used the charge that Shah was a member of Hezb-i-Islami to try him in a closed court run by the Afghan intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security. Shah was not permitted to have a defence lawyer, so the witnesses against him were not subjected to cross-examination.

Authorities failed to lay charges relating to, or even investigate, accusations that Shah had directed sectarian massacres of dozens of ethnic Hazaras in 1994. A water well in which witnesses claimed bodies had been dumped was not searched. Amnesty International raised concerns at the time of the trial that the omission may have been to cover up for others close to the government.

The sole purpose of the show trial appears to have been to get a death sentence against an expendable figure. Horrific crimes were committed against the Afghan people by the warlord leaders of the various *mujadeen* organisations which overthrew the pro-Soviet Kabul government in 1992. Shah is among the very few charged for one obvious reason: some of the most prominent and vicious warlords of the early 1990s sided with the US against the Taliban and are now members of the American-backed regime.

Amnesty International formally protested to Karzai about the Shah trial in September 2003 and called for assurances that the man would not be executed without fair trial. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission also called for a stay of execution on the

© World Socialist Web Site

grounds the trial had not been fair. The prosecution case depended heavily on a signed confession by Shah, which he claimed he had made under torture. Amnesty has not been able to find any evidence that an investigation was ever conducted into this allegation.

On April 26, after it became aware of Shah's execution, Amnesty International openly accused Karzai of having him killed in order to prevent him being used as a witness against other, more prominent individuals accused of war crimes.

Amnesty's statement declared: "Amnesty International fears that Abdullah Shah's execution may have been an attempt by powerful political players to eliminate a key witness to human rights abuses. During his detention, Abdullah Shah reportedly revealed first hand evidence against several regional commanders currently in positions of power against whom no charges have been brought. They are among the scores of other Afghans implicated in serious crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity... This is of particular concern in the context of upcoming elections due to be held in September 2004 when it is believed that several of these individuals will be standing for political office."

Amnesty has not named the "powerful political players" or the "several regional commanders." However there are various possibilities.

A story in the November 24, 2002 *Los Angeles Times* cited Shah claiming he had been working for a time under the command of Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, the leader of the political formation Ittehad-i-Islami and now a powerful political figure in US-controlled Afghanistan. Sayyaf's militiamen were accused of widespread atrocities against Afghanistan's Hazara population at roughly the same time as Shah was accused of murdering Hazaras.

Shah's execution also coincides with a series of sordid deals between the Kabul government and current and former members of Hezb-i-Islami.

In the past several months, three former leading members of Hezb-i-Islami who fell out with Hekmatyar in the early 1990s have accepted ministries in Karzai's government—Haji Mangal Hussain, Qazi Amin Waqad and Waheedullah Sabawoon.

According to the May 3 *New York Times*, 10 current leaders of Hezb-i-Islami have also made their peace with the US-backed regime and offered to collaborate with Karzai in exchange for being able to form a political party and stand in the elections. Among them is Khaled Farooqi, who reportedly controls militia forces in the unstable southeastern province of Paktika, where US forces have come under attack. One of those Karzai sent to negotiate the change in loyalties was Abdul Rasool Sayyaf.

Close to two years ago, there was great fanfare in the American and other Western media about how the installation of Karzai's government marked the beginnings of "democracy" for the long-suffering Afghan people. The case of Abdullah Shah is one more demonstration that it has no more respect for basic democratic and legal rights than a police state or military dictatorship. The Kabul regime is a clique of the same warlords and war criminals who terrorised Afghanistan in the early 1990s and who have been foisted back on the Afghan people by US imperialism.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site