

Canadian troops gun down Afghan civilian

Lee Parsons
18 March 2006

The grim reality of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) deployment in Afghanistan became apparent in Kandahar late Tuesday night, when a military convoy opened fire on a taxi, killing an unarmed civilian. Coming just hours after Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper had ended a three-day visit to Afghanistan, this killing illustrates the grave threat posed to the civilian population and the colonialist character of the CAF's "rebuilding" operation in this impoverished Central Asian country.

According to Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) correspondent Patrick Brown, who interviewed the dead man's family, there are widely diverging interpretations of what actually happened on the evening of March 14. Sharply contradicting the Canadian military's version of events on a number of key points, family members of the slain man, Nasrat Ali Hassan, say that no warning was given before a Canadian soldier opened fire, fatally shooting the husband and father of six.

Hassan's son, who was also in the taxi, said he pleaded with soldiers to take his father to the hospital but the interpreter attached to the CAF convoy warned him to stay back or else he too would be shot.

It took the Canadian military 16 hours to confirm that the event had actually taken place and even after such a lengthy delay, military authorities were unable to answer the most basic questions, e.g. why the victim was not given immediate medical attention.

Lieutenant Colonel Derek Basinger, chief of staff for Task Force Afghanistan, has stated that CAF personnel did not intend to use lethal force and that the passenger in the taxi (a three-wheel motorized rickshaw) was in fact killed by what were meant as warning shots. Basinger also claimed that the wounded Hassan was not treated by medics at the scene because they did not believe his wounds were life-threatening.

How warning shots went so far astray as to kill a man

is as inexplicable as how medics at the scene did not regard wounds resulting from a bullet which passed through Hassan's abdomen as serious enough to require immediate treatment.

In Basinger's version of events, the taxi, which was carrying three people, had proceeded past an Afghan police checkpoint without stopping, despite being given a number of visual warnings. But as *Globe and Mail* columnist Christie Blatchford conceded, many such checkpoints "consist of a couple of guards sitting in chairs."

Basinger further contends that the fatal "warning" shots were only fired when the taxi came within a meter of the convoy. "Our rules do not allow any Afghans to come within a certain distance," said Basinger.

Hassan was eventually taken to hospital by Afghan police. He died three hours after being admitted.

Canadian authorities are promising that the many outstanding questions will be answered following the outcome of investigations by both local police and the Canadian military. Although no decision has yet been made, military officials have said that they are considering compensating the family for their loss. They also have said that they will carry out an even more vigorous campaign to warn the residents of Kandahar to give CAF personnel and their vehicles "wide berth."

According to Basinger, Canadian troops, who recently assumed the leading role in the NATO mission in southern Afghanistan, have fired on Afghan civilians "on at least 10 separate occasions."

Colonel Mohammed Hussain of the Afghan National Police, who has been working closely with the CAF, has told Canwest News that the shooting "will create many problems" for Canadian troops in the future. "People in the city are upset."

It is not coincidental that this incident occurred on the heels of Prime Minister Harper's visit to Afghanistan.

During his visit, Canada's new prime minister made a series of bellicose statements, in which he encouraged greater resolve among the troops in carrying out the suppression of the insurgency against the US-installed government of Hamid Karzai. "We don't make a commitment and then run away at the first sign of trouble," declared Harper.

Canada's prime minister spent the better part of four days in Afghanistan and Pakistan in a very public tour that was aimed at rallying support in Canada for the CAF deployment in Afghanistan. Pivotal in this process was the fulsome support lent to Harper by the Canadian media, which has expressed alarm at opinion polls showing large-scale public opposition to Canada's military intervention in Afghanistan.

The killing of an innocent civilian in Afghanistan draws a chilling parallel to the Canadian deployment in Somalia in 1993, in which civilians were tortured and killed by Canadian soldiers involved in a U.N. "humanitarian" intervention. Under pressure from the military top brass, the Liberal government terminated the public inquiry it established into those events, but not before the affair had drawn into question the nature of such "peacekeeping" actions in the minds of the public.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact