

Two more Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Terry Cook
6 June 2011

Two more members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) were killed in Afghanistan last week, bringing the total number lost since the US-led war began in 2001 to 26, with 176 more injured. Six of the deaths have occurred since the beginning of this year, with 13 in the past 12 months.

On May 30, 25-year-old Lance-Corporal Andrew Jones, an army cook assigned to the Australian Mentoring Task Force, was shot while on guard duty at an outpost in the Chora Valley in the remote Oruzgan province. An Afghan soldier being trained by the Australian forces reportedly killed Jones, firing four shots at him before dropping his weapon and fleeing. The Afghan soldier is now the subject of an Australian military manhunt.

On the same day, Lieutenant Marcus Case, 27, died in a helicopter crash in Zabul province. The two incidents follow the death of 32-year-old Sergeant Brett Wood of the Second Commando Regiment in a bomb blast on May 23. Wood was buried in Sydney last Friday.

The Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard is clearly concerned that the accelerating death toll in Afghanistan will further fuel popular opposition to the criminal war.

Within hours of the latest deaths, Gillard went into damage control. While issuing the usual empty condolence to the families, she referred in particular to Monday's shooting as "a really troubling incident" and admitted that Australians "will be shocked and it will be causing them to ask questions."

The incident involving the "mentored" Afghan soldier undermines the government's rationale for supporting the US-led occupation. It claims that training Afghan forces will help to stabilise the country and pave the way for a "transition" process, handing over control to Afghan authorities beginning in 2014.

Gillard, with bipartisan support, reiterated Labor's unwavering commitment to the occupation, declaring "in the hardest of circumstances we need to be determined to stay the course in Afghanistan." The prime minister repeated the lie constantly peddled to justify the war stating: "We're in Afghanistan because we don't want it to be a safe haven for terrorists."

Liberal-National Party opposition leader Tony Abbott said that he too remained "committed" to the Australian deployment. He cynically justified the mounting death toll by saying there is "no such thing as a casualty-free combat."

Australia's involvement in Afghanistan is aimed at supporting Washington's efforts to secure hegemony over the geo-strategically and economically crucial region of Central Asia. In turn, Canberra's unstinting support ensures US military and diplomatic backing for the Australian ruling elite's own predatory ambitions in the South Pacific, including in East Timor and Solomon Islands.

Contrary to the official story peddled by the political establishment, the Australian military's so-called "mentoring" program of Afghan troops is not about developing sovereign control in Afghanistan, let alone Washington's claim to be working towards establishing democracy. The purpose of training local forces is to have a viable proxy force capable of taking over combat operations directed towards crushing the anti-occupation insurgency and terrorising the population. The military force is also required to prop up the deeply unpopular government of President Hamid Karzai that remains in power due only to the presence of 140,000 foreign troops in the country.

While seeking to capture the Afghan trainee soldier, the ADF has attempted to play down the significance of the Chora Valley killing. Having first claimed the

shooting was carried out by a “rogue” Afghan soldier, the ADF later admitted he could have been an insurgent infiltrated into the mentoring program. The army attempted to present the incident as something that was unlikely to occur again.

ADF Air Chief Marshal Houston declared: “Let me stress, we have been in Afghanistan on this mission for six years. We’ve worked with thousands and thousands of Afghans through those six years right from the outset, and this is the first incident we’ve had of this nature.”

While this may be a first for Australian forces, deadly attacks on NATO occupation forces by Afghan army personnel and local security forces have become more frequent, reflecting broad popular hostility to the neo-colonial occupation of the country.

According to an article published in the *Guardian* on May 31, NATO has recorded around 20 incidents in the past 18 months in which Afghan soldiers or policemen have attacked foreign forces, killing more than 50 personnel.

Two NATO trainers were killed by an Afghan police officer in Helmand in May, while in April an Afghan air force major shot and killed eight US troops and an American contractor in Kabul. Other so-called “green-on-blue” incidents include the shooting of two American soldiers during police training in the northern Faryab province, the killing of three Germans in the north of the country, the killing of six US troops by an Afghan border police officer in November last year, and the shooting of three British soldiers last July by an Afghan soldier. In November 2009, five British soldiers were shot and killed by an Afghan policeman in an attack at a police checkpoint.

The *Guardian* cited the widespread anger over “continuing civilian casualties caused by international troops” as one reason for the increasing frequency of these incidents. Another trigger for the attacks is undoubtedly the NATO forces’ contemptuous and demeaning treatment of the Afghan population, including the people they are training as police and soldiers. Video footage posted on the internet and broadcast on Australian television earlier this year showed Australian soldiers mouthing racial and demeaning terms to describe Afghans. (See: “Australian soldiers in Afghanistan post racist anti-Afghan comments”)

The determination of Washington and its allies to continue the war in Afghanistan will no doubt see more “green-on-blue” incidents. While some are sparked by seemingly individual disagreements and are routinely dismissed by NATO spokesmen as the outcome of “cultural misunderstandings”, they ultimately reflect the widespread popular hostility and growing resistance of the Afghan people to the colonial invasion and occupation of their country.



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