

US marines desecrate Afghan dead

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A video published yesterday shows four US marines in Afghanistan urinating on the heads of three Afghan dead, joking among themselves as they desecrate the corpses. It will join the gallery of images that have provided a glimpse of the inhumanity and brutality with which American soldiers are led to treat the victims of US militarism—in Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond.

A caption identifies the marines as members of “Scout Sniper Team 4” of the Third Battalion, Second Marine Regiment, which is based at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

The 3/2 Marines were last in Afghanistan between March and September 2011, as part of the Obama administration’s “surge” of 33,000 additional US troops, and were deployed in the southern province of Helmand. At least three members of the unit were killed in Helmand in June and July last year. The weather conditions in the video suggest it was also shot during the summer months.

The video—which runs for barely 50 seconds—appears to have been consciously staged, rather than being the recording of a spontaneous act. The corpses, of men aged somewhere between 20 and 40, had been placed in a line. The marines faced the camera in a semi-circle so their desecration was obvious.

There are no AK-47s or other weapons in view that would indicate the dead Afghans were armed combatants. Instead, an overturned wheelbarrow suggests otherwise. The bare feet of one of the deceased are also visible. He had been wearing the sandals typical of a farmer, not the sneakers or boots preferred by insurgents operating in the rugged terrain of southern Afghanistan.

Coming just days after an Afghan government investigation publicly accused the US military of torturing prisoners at the detention centre at Bagram Air Base, the public revelation of more abuses by American forces has provoked fury in the Obama

administration. It underscores the criminality of the entire decade-long US occupation, again exposing the official lies according to which US forces are bringing human rights and democracy to Afghanistan.

Masses of people in America and throughout the world are appalled and horrified at these events, which expose the vast gulf between the imperialist policies of the ruling class and the democratic sentiments of the population.

On Thursday, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta denounced the actions of the marines as “utterly deplorable,” vowing to investigate. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed her “total dismay”. The Marine Corps pledged an exhaustive investigation to bring the culprits to account.

By mid-afternoon, a marine officer at Camp Lejeune had leaked to the media that two of the participants in the video had already been identified. The headquarters of the US and NATO occupation force issued a statement describing the desecration as “inexplicable” and as the act of a “small group of US individuals.”

Such statements have become the thoroughly predictable response of the American political and military establishment to every exposure of depraved acts on the part of US troops throughout the so-called “war on terror”. Time and time again, they have been blamed on a so-called “isolated minority”, who are supposedly not representative of the military as a whole, let alone a reflection of the character of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq themselves.

Such apologetics have been thoroughly discredited by the stream of revelations of war crimes and atrocities carried out by US or NATO forces in the Middle East.

It is barely ten months, for example, since explicit photos and video taken in 2009 and 2010 were widely published that showed American troops in Kandahar province posing with Afghan corpses and body parts. Those actions were attributed to an alleged “kill team”

in the Fifth Stryker Brigade, who murdered unarmed Afghan civilians for sport and mutilated the bodies to take trophies.

The cold-blooded execution of wounded insurgents in Iraq—captured on camera during the 2004 battle for Fallujah—and the hideous abuse by US military prison guards at Abu Ghraib prison in 2003 were likewise blamed on “rogue” elements.

The reality, however, is that the crimes that have been publicly exposed are only the tiniest fraction of the murderous abuse suffered by the people of Afghanistan. The occupation is a predatory operation to impose a puppet state that will serve US imperialist interests in the resource-rich region of Central Asia. Like every colonial war before it, the forces waging it have used the most debased methods in an attempt to abuse, humiliate and terrorize the civilian population into abandoning resistance to occupation.

The mentality that pervades the US military, and which is inculcated into soldiers sent to the war, is that every Afghan is a potential enemy. The determined opposition of the Afghan people to the occupation is portrayed not as the outcome of their desire for freedom from foreign domination and oppression, but of religious fanaticism and irrationality that must be forcibly suppressed.

As in previous cases of military abuse, it seems the media will publicly vilify the rank-and-file troops involved in the desecration, but abstain from any commentary—let alone criticism—of the political and military establishment that created the climate in which this abuse took place.

The primary concern of the Obama administration over the publication of the video is most likely that a backlash among the Afghan population could disrupt its efforts to open up peace talks with a faction of the insurgency loyal to Taliban leader Mullah Omar.

According to a report in the *New York Times* on Thursday, preliminary discussions have already taken place between a confirmed representative of Omar and Marc Grossman, the diplomatic envoy of the White House. A Taliban office is slated to open in the Gulf state of Qatar. Negotiations are said to have begun on the potential release of top-ranking Taliban leaders who have been held in Guantanamo since 2001, and a potential broader settlement between the Taliban and the US in Afghanistan (See, “US backs Taliban office

in Qatar in bid for Afghanistan deal”).

The Taliban leadership have sent a signal that after 10 years of warfare they are looking for a deal with the Obama administration that ultimately restores them to a degree of influence in Afghanistan. In a statement issued Thursday, a Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, downplayed the video as “not a new thing” and “normal with the American forces and their allies”.

Another Taliban statement declared that it would “not affect negotiations with the Americans because they are only about the release of prisoners and the office in Qatar”.



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