

No prosecution of US troops for defiling Afghan corpses, burning Korans

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Three US Marines and six soldiers have escaped criminal prosecution in connection with the videotaped urination on the corpses of slain Afghans and the burning of copies of the Koran in two separate incidents that provoked bloody unrest earlier this year.

Other Marines still face separate charges in connection with the videotape that surfaced last January, showing four members of a sniper unit laughing and making sarcastic comments while urinating on the battered corpses of three Afghan men.

Army and Marine officials announced separately on Monday that the nine soldiers had been given only administrative penalties, while refusing to name those involved.

This form of punishment normally includes measures such as forfeiture of rank or pay, confinement to base or the issuing of letters of reprimand. It is likely to be seen in Afghanistan as a slap on the wrist, potentially triggering a new round of attacks on US-led occupation forces. The Pentagon refused to comment on whether or not US installations in Afghanistan are being placed on heightened alert.

The Koran-burning incident, which took place in February, barely a month after the appearance of the video of the Marines desecrating Afghan corpses, sparked several days of popular upheavals, including attacks by crowds of Afghans on US and NATO bases. At least 41 people were killed in the violence, including six American troops.

At the time, US officials made statements accepting that the incidents involved serious offenses and would be treated as such. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated publicly that the Marines who urinated on the dead Afghans could be guilty of a war crime, while the deputy commander of US forces in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, issued a message to troops that “defiling, desecrating, mocking, photographing or filming for

personal use insurgent dead constitutes a grave breach” of laws governing armed conflict.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta pronounced that those involved would be “held accountable to the fullest extent.”

Similarly, in the Koran-burning incident, President Barack Obama issued a written apology to the Afghan government vowing to take measures to avoid any repetition of this behavior that would “include holding accountable those responsible.” The puppet government of US-backed President Hamid Karzai issued its own statement saying that US officials had promised “bringing to justice, through an open trial, those responsible for the incident.”

The three Marines punished in the desecration case pleaded guilty to the administrative charges, avoiding a court martial.

The extent of the punishment in the Koran-burning episode consists of letters of reprimand issued to four Army officers and two enlisted soldiers.

An investigation led by Army Brig. Gen. Bryan G. Watson concluded that the personnel involved in the Koran burnings had chosen “the easy way instead of the right way” of dealing with a supposed problem inside the US-run prison at the Bagram air base. This involved suspicions that Afghan prisoners were using copies of the Koran and other religious texts to secretly communicate with each other.

The report acknowledged that the US soldiers attempted to burn 500 copies of the Koran, far more than the 100 that were acknowledged by the US military at the time. In addition, they had sought to incinerate nearly 1,500 other volumes from the prison library, including religious texts falsely identified as “extremist” literature and secular books. The operation was aborted when Afghan employees at the base incinerator noticed that the bags of

trash brought to be burned included the Korans.

The Army probe rejected any charge that the actions of the soldiers involved was motivated by “malicious intent to disrespect the Koran or defame the faith of Islam.”

Perhaps the most revealing part of the investigation's conclusions, however, was that the US soldiers who organized the Koran burnings had ignored the strenuous objections by Afghan soldiers and guards at the prison, who warned them that they were making a grievous mistake.

“That US service members did not heed the warnings of their ANA [Afghanistan National Army] partners is, perhaps, my biggest concern,” General Watson wrote. The report cited “mistrust” between the US and Afghan troops.

This “mistrust” has only deepened dramatically in the six months since the Koran burnings, taking the form of so-called “green-on-blue” attacks in which Afghan soldiers and police are killing US troops assigned to train them.

In the latest incident, an Afghan army soldier fired a rocket-propelled grenade at US personnel Monday in eastern Laghman province, killing two American soldiers before he himself was killed by return fire.

Since the beginning of this year, 42 US and other foreign occupation troops have died in such attacks, with 11 US troops having been killed in just the last week. There has been a sharp escalation in these insider attacks since 2011, when 35 US-led occupation troops were killed in such incidents during the entire year.

US commanders have routinely attempted to deny that these attacks are anything more than isolated incidents stemming from personal frictions. The top US commander in Afghanistan, Marine Gen. John Allen, even went so far as to attribute the recent spike in these killings to the effects of Ramadan fasting.

Last week, however, the deep-going concern within the Pentagon about the impact of the “green-on-blue” attacks was made clear when US Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey made an emergency trip to Kabul to press for both US forces and the ANA to take stricter precautions.

These measures include orders for American troops to keep their fully loaded weapons at hand at all times to respond to an attack by their Afghan “allies.” In addition troops have been assigned to act as “guardian angels,” keeping a constant armed watch over Afghan personnel. These actions only serve to deepen tensions, however, with US troops treating every Afghan soldier and

policeman as a potential assassin.

Meanwhile, despite rosy assessments provided by US commanders, there are increasing indications that the puppet forces being trained by the Pentagon are woefully unprepared to take over the suppression of armed opposition to the US-led occupation. The Afghan Ministry of Defense this week issued a stunning report that some 600 ANA troops have been killed by insurgents in the last two months alone.

In the latest incident, 10 Afghan soldiers were killed in an attack on a checkpoint in southern Helmand province Sunday night, and four others wounded. Afghan officials reported Monday that five of the soldiers assigned to the checkpoint had left with the attackers. They said it was unclear whether they had defected or had been taken prisoner.

The number of US troops deployed in Afghanistan is supposed to be reduced to 68,000 by the end of next month, still double the number fighting there when President Obama took office. There is no timetable for the drawdown of the rest of these troops, even though Washington has pledged to have all “combat forces” out of the country by the end of 2014.

In a recent press interview, the second-in-command of the US occupation, Lt. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, said that the US should keep all 68,000 US troops in Afghanistan well into 2013. After that, it is widely anticipated that the 2014 US “withdrawal” will leave tens of thousands of American military “advisers” and “trainers” as well as Special Operations units occupying the country indefinitely.

There has been no discussion of these plans in the US presidential election campaign, with both parties rigorously excluding any expression of the sentiments of the majority of the American people, who want an end to the 11-year-old war.



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