

Australian soldiers launch reprisal over “green on blue” incident

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Australian forces hunting the Afghan National Army fugitive who killed three Australian soldiers last week have shot dead two people in a raid on the village of Sola in the southern province of Uruzgan. According to various news reports, the soldiers killed the 70-year-old imam of the village and his 30-year-old son, and detained 12 other people. A woman was among those detained, provoking outrage among the ethnic Pashtun tribesmen whose village was invaded. The raid took place on August 31, three days after the deaths of the Australian soldiers in a “green on blue” incident.

The assault on the village was a neo-colonial act of collective punishment, designed to terrorise Sola’s inhabitants for their alleged support for Sergeant Hekmatullah, the man accused of killing the Australian troops.

Sardar Mohammed told the *Australian* newspaper that Australian forces arrived in non-military vehicles Friday night while most of the village’s inhabitants were praying at the mosque. “They brought everyone out of the mosque and houses and tied their hands,” he said. “It was about 20 to 25 people and they started beating them a little bit ... As soon as they captured me, they put a hood over my eyes,” he said.

Mr Sardar said no-one had seen the two men being killed as they were all hooded at the time but they had heard two shots fired. He denied the slain men were involved in the anti-occupation insurgency. “They were not Taliban, they were poor people,” he insisted.

Mr Sardar claimed that the 12 detained individuals were driven to the Australian army base at Tarin Kowt and questioned about a Taliban commander named Hekmet, who is believed to be connected to Sergeant Hekmatullah. Eleven were released, but one was held in custody.

In its initial statement, the Australian military claimed

that the village raid had been “approved in accordance with normal process” and the men killed had been “engaged in accordance with the rules of engagement.”

The local village council chief, however, has insisted that only Australian troops carried out the assault on his community. This breached an agreement between the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai and NATO that all night-time raids be carried out under the command of Afghan forces. The village head also denied that those killed and detained were Taliban fighters or supporters. “They’re civilised people, they’re shopkeepers and tailors,” he said.

An Uruzgan journalist told the *Australian* that locals were furious over the arrest of a local woman and her interrogation at the Australia base in Tarin Kowt. Australian defence minister Stephen Smith later admitted that this was the first known occurrence of a woman being detained “according to our records”.

The anger in Uruzgan over the raid compelled the Karzai regime to issue a statement distancing itself from the blatant revenge attack by Australian forces.

“The president condemns the operation as a breach of the memorandum of understanding signed between Afghanistan and NATO on the special military operations,” the statement read. The Afghanistan government claimed that only nine people were detained and they were released on Karzai’s orders.

A senior NATO source described Karzai’s statement as “bizarre” and speculated he had intervened because those detained or killed in the raid were “extremely well connected” members of his own Popalzai tribe—one of his few bases of support among the Pashtun population.

Provincial authorities have also stated that no Afghan officials were informed beforehand of the raid and that no Afghan forces took part. Nevertheless, both the

Australian Defence Force and the ISAF have claimed that Afghan officials in the province were informed of the operation and that Afghan troops participated.

ISAF spokesman Adam Wojack said the force that attacked Sola was “65 percent ISAF and 35 percent Afghan National Security Forces”. Wojack admitted that ISAF and Karzai had conflicting versions of events. Australian defence minister Stephen Smith later claimed that there were “60 Australian Defence Force personnel and over 80 Afghan army personnel” involved in the operation.

Karzai ally and Uruzgan police chief Matiullah Khan has branded the two men killed in the raid as Taliban insurgents. Khan, however, is one of the reasons why the Australian and other foreign troops in the area are so hated. A tribal warlord accused of drug trafficking and other crimes, he has risen to prominence by collaborating with the US-led occupation and the Australian forces in Uruzgan in particular. His personal militia, which has been equipped and trained by Australian troops, controls the highway to the major city of Kandahar and extorts money from truck drivers travelling the road. It is allegedly responsible for killings and the systemic abuse of Afghan civilians.

The Australian attack on Sola is part of the reign of terror that has been inflicted on the Afghan people since the US-led invasion in 2001. Night-time raids against Afghan settlements by ISAF forces are virtually daily occurrences in Afghanistan. In 2009, Australian commandos assaulted the village of Sur Murghab in Uruzgan, killing one man and five children and wounding two adults and two young girls. Such atrocities have fuelled the popular opposition to the occupation.

The increase of ‘green on blue’ attacks—Afghan government forces turning their weapons on their purported foreign allies and trainers—is one of the results. The collective punishment meted out to the people of Sola by the Australian military will only intensify the hatred felt towards the occupation forces and contribute to the growing support for the insurgency.

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