

Five British Royal Marines charged with murdering Afghan insurgent

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Five British Royal Marines have been charged with the murder of an insurgent in Afghanistan. This is the first such charge involving a soldier from the UK in the war.

Nine marines were arrested—seven last Thursday and two over the weekend, regarding an incident in 2011. Four were released without charge.

The five charged remain in custody, and the next stage of the process is likely to be trial by court martial. The suspects have yet to be named.

The marines were arrested by the Royal Military Police (RMP) after incriminating video footage was found on a laptop belonging to a military serviceman by civilian police in the UK. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) had previously maintained simply that the incident followed an “engagement with an insurgent.”

The Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA), which conducts prosecutions on behalf of the military, decided the five should face murder charges.

The incident occurred during the six-month deployment of UK marines to Helmand, between April and September 2011, as part of 3 Commando Brigade. They were operating in the districts of Nahr-e Saraj and Nad Ali, where scores of British troops have died since 2006 and an uncounted number of Afghans have been killed. The MoD would not say when the alleged incident took place or where, but confirmed that it was alleged to have happened during a skirmish with insurgents.

Nothing untoward was reported to commanding officers at the time, but the investigation began about a month ago when an individual within the military came forward.

The MoD said that the alleged murder involved a combatant and implied the accused men are being investigated for actions after the insurgent was already

in their custody. It refused to give further details of the incident. But the inquiry is understood to be focusing on what happened after the marines and the insurgent were involved in a firefight, and whether the latter was unarmed when he was killed.

The footage is believed to show marines discussing what to do with the injured insurgent and whether to administer first aid. It reportedly cuts out before anything happens, but may still provide investigators with crucial evidence concerning the alleged murder.

The Royal Marines are regarded as the official elite armed forces of the British Army, roughly equivalent to the US Navy SEALs.

The arrested marines were charged on whether there was evidence they had broken the rules of engagement (ROE) that all British military personnel are expected to abide by. Defence Secretary Philip Hammond, speaking on the BBC’s *Andrew Marr Show*, said, “Everybody serving in theatre knows the rules of engagement, they carry cards in their uniforms with the rules on them in case they should need to remind themselves.”

The political and military elite are well aware of the possible fallout of this case. The *Guardian* noted, “The sensitivity of the case has led to a near news blackout at the MoD to allow the RMP to conduct an investigation that is thought to be the first of its kind involving British forces in Afghanistan. The marines are regarded as among the elite of the British armed forces, and commanders hailed their efforts in Afghanistan last year as having ‘historical importance’ in the fight against the Taliban.”

When the Royal Marines returned from Operation Herrick 14 in autumn last year, the MoD said they had helped to “strangle the insurgency in Helmand.” Helmand is where the majority of Britain’s 9,500

troops in Afghanistan are deployed. The commander, Brigadier Davis, said the 6,500-strong brigade had mostly kept the insurgency in check, and claimed that in the first four months of the tour, 16 low-level commanders were had been killed or captured.

However, Davis ominously warned at the time that there was “a hard core of the insurgency left. It is becoming harder to kill or capture the ones who are left, so the challenge is still very much still there.”

BBC News defence correspondent Jonathan Beale commented on the impact of the charge of murder against the soldiers on deepening anti-war sentiment in the population, saying, “...there are many others who seriously question why British service personnel are still fighting and dying in a war that’s already lasted more than a decade.”

He added that “These allegations threaten to undermine their [the Armed Forces’] reputation—not just for the five Royal Marines who have been charged with murder, but for everyone in uniform.”

The military elite are now involved, through the MoD, RMP and SPA, in a classic case of damage limitation, as the US-led military occupation of Afghanistan is increasingly unravelling. The invasion and 11-year-long US/NATO occupation of Afghanistan have been based on the slaughter, maiming and terrorising of its population and the destruction of its infrastructure for the geo-political interests of the imperialist powers. UK forces have played a full and bloody part in this criminal operation. As with every other atrocity committed by UK/US occupying troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is no doubt that great effort will be expended by the military to show this event was an “aberration” and not the norm.

The fact that UK troops are now being charged with murder in Afghanistan in fact underscores the filthy and criminal nature of the operations led by British imperialism over the past decade. In Iraq, British troops have had to answer numerous allegations of torture and abuse of Iraqis. In 2003, hotel receptionist Baha Mousa died while in custody at a British base after being detained in a raid in Basra. Only years later did six soldiers appear before a court martial, before being acquitted of wrongdoing. One soldier pleaded guilty and served just one year in jail. Most of the alleged cases of abuse and torture, which continue to mount, have never even reached a court hearing.



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