

# More Australian war crimes exposed in Afghanistan

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Fresh revelations are emerging that further lay bare the long-running official coverup of illegal Australian Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) killings and other abuses throughout the US-led occupation of Afghanistan.

The Australian Federal Police is now investigating a second killing by the special forces officer, known publicly only as Soldier C, after an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) report revealed video evidence showing the murder of a disabled Afghan farmer in March 2012.

The belated investigation comes amid a protracted closed-door inquiry by the Inspector General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) into least 55 alleged incidents of SAS involvement in war crimes between 2005 and 2016.

Two patrol members stated that Soldier C shot Ziauddin, an Afghan farmer in his early 20s from the Paryan Nawa region of Kandahar province, in the back of the head at point blank range as he tried to “limp away.” One soldier told the ABC: “He was obviously intellectually disabled. His head exploded. There was no need for what happened. No need whatsoever. In my book that was war crimes—murder.”

Ziauddin’s relative Zalimulla backed up the claims. “There was a raid,” he said. “[Helicopters] landed at about 11:00. He was about 80 to 100 metres away from where [they] landed. As [they] landed, he came towards home, he wanted to come home. He walked a distance but those people shot him.” He explained that Ziauddin was mentally disabled due to being beaten by the Taliban two years earlier and could not have been a threat to the Australian soldiers.

A patrol member was ordered to dress the man’s body in a “battle bra” chest rig containing assault rifle magazines, in order to make it appear he was an enemy

combatant. When the patrol arrived back at base they were told to regard the dead man as a “high value target” and a legitimate kill. “I knew that was a lie. Everyone there knew that was a lie,” a patrol member said.

Soldier C was stood down following the showing of a soldier’s helmet footage by investigative ABC news program “Four Corners” earlier this year, which clearly revealed the point blank execution of unarmed Afghan farmer Dad Mohammad in May 2012. Despite being initially cleared by ADF on the basis that the man had a radio (and was possibly therefore a scout for the Taliban), the footage led to a referral to the police.

The exposure of Ziauddin’s killing highlights the years of coverups by successive governments, both Liberal-National and Labor, of military abuses in the Middle East.

In 2016, the military commissioned an initial inquiry after supposedly becoming concerned about the impact of years of high-intensity deployments on Australia’s special forces. Dr. Samantha Cromptvoets was hired as a consultant to gather the classified, later leaked, documents that prompted the IGADF inquiry.

The Cromptvoets report, which involved interviewing a range of personnel, attributed the abuses to a military “culture” of “unsanctioned and illegal application of violence on operations.”

However, despite over 250 people being interviewed so far, not a single person has yet been charged, and the IGADF inquiry, overseen by Supreme Court Justice and Major General Paul Brereton, will reportedly only hand down “recommendations” later this year.

In fact, the only charge is against military lawyer David McBride, who faces a closed-door trial for allegedly leaking classified documents to the ABC in 2017. Known as the “Afghan Files,” they document at

least 10 incidents of possible war crimes. The Federal Police also raided the ABC headquarters and two ABC journalists, Dan Oakes and Sam Clarke, could still be prosecuted.

At the same time, former special forces soldier and Victoria Cross and Medal for Gallantry recipient Ben Roberts-Smith, lauded as a “war hero” by the political establishment and mainstream media, has pursued defamation cases against three newspapers for more than three years.

Military documents recently released during the proceedings claim that in September 2012, Roberts-Smith took a handcuffed Afghan man called Ali Jan, placed him at the edge of a small cliff, then kicked him so he fell into a dry creek bed, before ordering another soldier, known only as “Person 11,” to shoot him. The documents also allege that between 2009 and 2012, Roberts-Smith was involved in another four murders during his tours of duty, including one of an unarmed civilian who had a prosthetic leg.

On Wednesday, Sandy Dawson SC, who represents the newspapers, introduced two more allegations into the proceedings. The court was told that Roberts-Smith was involved in the killings in the villages of Sola and Syahchow, both in Uruzgan province, in August and October 2012.

The first pertained to a patrol member known as “Person 4” under Roberts-Smith’s command allegedly asking for a “throw down,” which meant giving an Afghan detainee a radio to make killing him permissible under the rules of engagement.

The second concerned accusations that Roberts-Smith directed a soldier known as “Person 66” to kill an Afghan detainee in a field in Syahchow, in order to “blood” the young soldier. Dawson said: “Blooding is a term [for] the process by which a young soldier is directed to kill for the first time and is therefore ‘blooded.’”

This brings the number of war crime allegations against Roberts-Smith, one of the most decorated soldiers to serve in Afghanistan, to seven.

Attorney-General Christian Porter has applied for special secrecy laws to be invoked for the defamation case, cutting off public oversight of the hearing. Porter earlier made a similar application for the McBride trial.

Attempts to attribute war crimes to “bad apples” in the military are a whitewash. The systematic abuses

and protracted cover-ups are inseparable from the decades-long imperialist wars in, and occupation of, Afghanistan and Iraq, conducted to attempt to secure US control over the strategic and resource-rich Middle East and Central Asia region.

The special forces have been on the frontline of these operations precisely because their members are trained and conditioned to kill. Far from curbing the SAS, the current Liberal-National government is following its predecessors in boosting them.

Project GREYFIN, a \$3 billion program over the next two decades, will in its first phase go toward “cutting-edge body armour, weapons, and parachuting and climbing systems.” This is part of a massive expansion of military spending, with \$200 billion allocated over a decade for new war planes, vessels and hardware.



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