

**Mass Murder in Kandahar:
Tip of the Iceberg in Afghanistan;
Warning for US Society**

Staff Sergeant Roger Bales has just been condemned to serve live in prison for the cold-blooded murder of 15 Afghan men, women and children in March of 2012. Below is an article this writer wrote at the time of this war crime.

As an adult, Staff Sergeant Roger Bales – the accused butcher of 16 Afghan men, women and children – never was a very nice person. He only joined the US military after he was caught having bilked a retired couple out of their life savings.



*Staff Sergeant
Roger Bales*

He has been accused of hit-and-run driving and assault on a former girl friend. But such acts of callous greed, selfishness and petty violence are commonplace – the mentality behind them are encouraged by capitalist society - but they don't ordinarily translate into mass murder.

Lone “Lunatic”?

US authorities claim that Bales was just a lone lunatic. They claim to have a video of Bales returning to base, putting down his rifle, raising his arms and saying, “I did it.” However, some Afghan witnesses claim that a group of US soldiers were the perpetrators. According to a Reuters report, “Neighbors said they had awoken to crackling gunfire from American soldiers, who they described as laughing and drunk. ‘They were all drunk and shooting all over the place,’ said

neighbor Agha Lala, who visited one of the homes where the killings took place.” It may be, however, that these troops were only there after the fact. Maybe they burned the bodies in the hopes of covering up the crime.



Family of Bales' victims

Most likely, outside of those directly involved, we will never know the exact details of this war crime. In fact, it is hardly relevant, because the truth is that US troops have been engaged in war crimes for years in Afghanistan and the regime here, including its corporate media, have been covering this fact up all along. By so doing, they are co-conspirators in these crimes.

Meanwhile, Bradley Manning remains in solitary confinement, facing possible life behind bars, for allegedly having in effect blown the cover on these war crimes.

“Kill Team”

Back in February of 2011, there came to light the activities of the infamous US “kill team” operating in the same region of Afghanistan. They killed Afghans in cold blood and then planted weapons on them. In one instance, they surrounded a house where the family was celebrating a birth. When two older men came out of the house to inquire why their house was surrounded, the kill team shot them down. Then they killed two pregnant women and a teenage girl. The killers later reported that the three women had been

victims of an “honor killing.” These assassinations were simply part of a pattern. This group routinely cut off fingers of victims to keep as trophies. In another instance they killed one young boy in cold blood.



An article in “Rolling Stone” magazine (3/27/11) reported extensively on the “kill team” killings and the subsequent attempted cover ups. *“Far from being clandestine, as the Pentagon has implied, the murders of civilians were common knowledge among the unit and understood to be illegal by “pretty much the whole platoon,” according to one soldier who complained about them,”* they wrote.

In addition, there have been numerous cases of US bombings and strafings of “innocent” civilians, including a group of young boys who were out gathering fire wood. The US top brass has claimed that these were merely mistakes, but the actions of this kill team above must make one doubt this. Why should not air force pilots not want to get in on the mayhem?

Cover Up From On High

This platoon also took hundreds of photos celebrating the killings and mutilations. As Rolling Stone reported, the Pentagon went to extraordinary lengths to recover all these photos. Their purpose was not to bring charges against the culprits; it was to destroy the evidence. And several of the commanders who repeatedly failed to report these crimes have been promoted.

One of the two soldiers ultimately charged with the war crimes, a Private Morlock, explained how the attitudes of the top military brass found its way down to the rank and file troops, through the immediate commanding officers. “None of us in the platoon – the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant – no one gives a f__k about these people,” he said.

The “kill team” killers’ claim that the deaths in the birth ceremony were the result of an “honor killing” was repeated verbatim by the Pentagon, and from there by the US corporate-controlled media. This was despite the fact that the claims were demonstrable lies from the start. (See for instance:

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/02/12/afghanistan.bodies/index.html>.)

By so doing, these forces were encouraging further such acts; it makes them guilty for the continued war crimes, including the recent Kandahar murders.

Dangerous Undercurrent

Below this level of blatant war crimes lives an undercurrent of violence and frustration on a daily basis. In an article entitled “A Gathering Menace”, the “American Scholar” magazine carries a report on this in their spring, 2012 issue. The article appears as almost a prediction of exactly the mass murder which was perpetrated just shortly after its publication. It describes a general culture of violence, a brutalization of US soldiers in Afghanistan. *“Most soldierly stupidity*

does not amount to crime,” they write; “most soldiers never commit atrocities. U.S. soldiers shooting at goats, for example, or pilots getting drunk on base, or guards threatening the lives of prisoners, all things I have seen.... the subhuman wash of aggression and the small episodes of violence military men and women cycle through daily.”

The author concludes: *“I felt I was watching some of the men unravel toward serious crimes, if, in fact, they had not already committed them elsewhere in Afghanistan or Iraq. Evil or atrocity often explodes from a furnace built by the steady accretion of small, unchallenged wrongs.”* It was precisely such “evil” that exploded that night of March 11 in Kandahar province.

Necessary for Occupying Army

Such contempt and hatred is necessary to instill in all occupying armies. It was instilled in the Japanese troops that invaded Korea and China prior to WW II; it was instilled in the Italian troops that invaded Ethiopia and the Spanish troops that invaded Algeria. It is instilled in the Israeli troops who occupy Palestinian lands today.

The methods of instilling these attitudes are important to understand because they shed a light on the ultimate consequences in the society of the occupiers.

Resistance to Killing

Shortly after WW II, a study conducted by U.S. Army Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall revealed that up to 85% of US troops refused to shoot to kill during battles in that war. They intentionally fired over the heads of the “enemy” troops. Other studies indicated that this is probably commonplace in most wars. This indicates an inherent mass resistance to killing one’s

own kind amongst human beings, and US military tops took note and used modern psychology to devise means of overcoming this trait. As “The Compassionate Instinct” by Dacher Keltner et al. comments, “Since World War II, a new era has quietly dawned in modern warfare: an era of psychological warfare, conducted not upon the enemy, but upon one’s own troops.”

They used a series of means to manufacture what one author calls “manufactured contempt”.

Such contempt has been induced in all occupying armies throughout time, mainly based on instinctive methods of the military commanders. Now, more scientific methods are used and the results are more effective. The authors of the above referred to book explain that the effectiveness of this can be seen in “the discrepancy in dozens of modern conflicts, including in Somalia, where 18 trapped U.S. troops killed an estimated 364 Somali fighters.” In other words, the US troops had been desensitized but the Somalis had not, thus leaving them less willing to kill and more vulnerable as a result.

PTSD - Suicides & Murders

The consequences are devastating on the individuals so psychologically violated. While “post traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD), without using the particular term, has long been in existence amongst soldiers, it appears to be far worse today amongst US troops and veterans. Some of this may be attributed to the



length of deployment, but that doesn't seem to account for all of it.



The US Veterans Administration reports that up to 20% of military vets suffer from PTSD, but the VA is known to systematically underestimate this number. A more accurate picture can be gained from the fact that according to the Center for New American Security, some 18 US military veterans commit suicide *every day* – one every 80 minutes – while amongst active US troops that rate is one every 36 hours. This means that more are dying at their own hands than at the hands of the “enemy”.

The violence is not only turned on themselves, it is turned on others. That this was inevitable is revealed in some of the comments repeated in the “American Scholar” magazine reported comments by soldiers who said they were planning to kill their ex-girlfriend or wife. These are not idle threats. Just recently an Iraq War vet in the San Francisco Bay area apparently killed his 11 year old sister and his mother. In January, another Iraq War vet was charged with killing four homeless men in Southern California and another apparently killed a National Park ranger in the same area.

As with the war crimes in Afghanistan, the corporate controlled US media and the corporate politicians are complicit in this through their relative silence.

Political Consequences

But there is another, and potentially even more dangerous result.

Occupying troops tend to be used for repressive purposes domestically. Thus it was that fascist General Franco used the troops occupying Spanish colonies in Africa as the backbone of his fascist army during the Spanish Civil War, for example. Today, there is the rise of the English Defence League – a group of street thugs who are trying to organize pogroms against Muslim people in England. They claim close connections with British soldiers and at least some of their claims are almost certainly accurate.



And amongst US soldiers?

Isn't it certain that the desensitization to violence, the dehumanization of others, the racism that is encouraged amongst US troops will have political consequences at home? When they return home many of them will face not only personal crises, but economic and financial crises due to the economic crisis here at home. In the absence of a real mass workers' movement, isn't it inevitable that many of these vets will turn all this pent-up hatred and dehumanization loose onto US society in the form of a political movement? Isn't it likely that a new form of violent, radical political reaction develops based at least in part on some of these vets?

This is why the killing of 16 men, women and children in Kandahar not only represents the tip of the iceberg in

Afghanistan, why it not only represents the inevitable criminal actions that any occupying army carries out as well as the cover up by the upper echelons and the corporate-controlled mass media; it also represents a threat to workers and to women and to especially oppressed minorities in the “mother” country – the United States – itself.

Serious Problem for US Capitalism

This situation is causing serious problems for the US regime at home and abroad.

Let us not forget that the issue that forced then President Bush to move to withdraw US troops from Iraq was the fact that Iraqi Prime Minister Malaki insisted that those US soldiers accused of crimes in Iraq must be tried by the Iraqi regime in Iraq. While this insistence represented a closer link between the Iraqi and the Iranian regime, it also represented increased pressure from below in Iraq itself. Chinese capitalism is trying to establish ties with the Karzai regime in Afghanistan and is using this mass murder to help do so. In addition, the Afghan regime must be under tremendous pressure from below on this and similar issues. While Karzai needs the US troops in Afghanistan if he wishes to remain in the country with his head still on his shoulders, his allowing him to stay there makes his regime steadily weaker also. The mass murder will also help create further divisions between the US and the Pakistani regime as the latter is dealing with US drone and other attacks there.

Domestically, the presence of the many thousands of brutalized war veterans is a further destabilizing element in US society. While some have taken out their brutalization on fellow individuals, and while some are likely to turn to vicious,

organized reaction, others are organizing against the war and are becoming radicalized. Scott Olson, the ex-Marine who was shot in the head by a police tear gas canister at Occupy Oakland is an example.

As US workers start to move into action, the radicalized war veterans in their midst will play a vital role in deepening the consciousness and militancy of the US working class as a whole.



BART workers on strike – the alternative to self destruction and reaction