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AFGHANISTAN WATCH

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UK's Afghanistan Inquiry To Centre On 'Conduct' Of Special Forces

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/5/british-soldiers-at-the-centre-of-afghanistan-inquiry-minister>

British special forces are at the heart of an inquiry into allegations of unlawful activity in Afghanistan, the United Kingdom's defence ministry has confirmed. Defence Minister Ben Wallace commissioned the independent probe in December 2022; it will also consider accusations that the Royal Military Police's (RMP) investigation of unlawful killings by special forces was inadequate.

Comments

Since 2003 the United Kingdom has been actively contributing to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. The UK's occupation in Afghanistan concluded in 2014. However, the Special Forces unit chose to remain and continued to combat the Taliban and ISIS threats. Considering the role of elite units to 'train, advise, or support' the Afghan troops, there have been several accounts of the SAS and SBS participating in raids and cordon search operations killing nearly 300 civilians between 2009 and 2012.[1]

What Is The Issue?

Saifullah and Noorzai families, initiated judicial review proceedings in 2019 and 2020, allegedly over the deaths of their relatives as part of a larger gameplan undertaken by UK Special Forces deployed in Afghanistan in carrying out extrajudicial killings. Reports allude during a six-month tour of duty; on average every elite soldier is speculated to have "personally killed" 35 Afghans.[2] These records were covered up by senior SAS and SBS officers as well as Whitehall officials to continue with their alleged mission adhering to the execution of "all fighting-age males" in areas that were raided, "regardless of the threat they posed." Surprisingly in 2015, the event came to light when an MoD insider disclosed covert details of Operation Northmoor and the subsequent crimes of the high-ranking officers which were not addressed by the military police. The Ministry of Defence announced on December 15, 2022, the creation of an independent statutory inquiry to look into and report on any alleged illegal behaviour by the British Armed Forces during deliberate detention operations (DDO) in Afghanistan between mid-2010 and mid-2013, as well as the effectiveness of any previous investigations into such allegations.[3]

[1]<https://aoav.org.uk/2023/the-19-countries-where-uk-special-forces-have-been-reported-to-have-been-deployed-operationally-since-2011/>

[2]<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/02/eighty-afghan-civilians-may-have-been-summarily-killed-by-sas-inquiry-told>

[3]<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/05/afghanistan-alleged-unlawful-killings-sas-mod-hearing>

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Lord Justice Sir Charles Haddon-Cave, a senior presiding judge for England and Wales was appointed by the Secretary of State for Defence to lead The Nimrod Review, an independent investigation into broader issues related to the loss of the RAF Nimrod MR2 aircraft XV230 in Afghanistan in 2006, will serve as the inquiry's chairman. The latest charges are mentioned in a document that the law firm Leigh Day filed for a new public investigation into claims that SAS personnel committed war crimes in Afghanistan based on earlier Ministry of Defence court admissions. It draws attention to worries expressed in emails sent at the time by top army officers, who warned that "there appears to be a casual disregard for life." However, a 2011 internal review did not result in a modification of the killing pattern.

In July 2023, the British MoD gave up trying to prevent any mention of the Special Forces' potential involvement in war crimes in Afghanistan. Bereaved family members and other media sources, including the BBC, had contested the MoD's position. The investigation comes after years of reporting on alleged unlawful killings by the SAS. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said in a statement before a hearing of the Independent Inquiry into Afghanistan: **"The inquiry is now reaching the stage of substantive hearings, and I can confirm that the allegations relate to the conduct of UK Special Forces."** The MoD's previous stance has been reversed by the decision to confirm Special Forces units' participation in the activities under investigation by the inquiry. Wallace claimed that only "in the exceptional circumstances of this inquiry" was the Special Forces involvement confirmed. "Such confirmation should not be seen as changing the longstanding position of this government, and previous governments, to not comment on the deployment or activities of the UK Special Forces outside of this very specific context," he said. The MoD has previously argued that "any evidence or documents or words or passages of documents, that tend to confirm or deny the alleged involvement of United Kingdom Special Forces in the operations that are to be investigated" during the inquiry should be kept from the public.

A partial admission by the defence secretary that UK special forces were present in Afghanistan risks discrediting a public inquiry investigating allegations of unlawful killings by the SAS, according to a lawyer representing victims' families. Richard Hermer KC (lawyer) said Ben Wallace had made only "a semi-concession" in a preliminary hearing on Wednesday **when the minister made a rare acknowledgement that "UK special forces" were present in Afghanistan.[4]**

[4]<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/sas-should-be-named-in-uk-inquiry-into-alleged-unlawful-killings-in-afghanistan-lawyer/2938106>

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Source: Reuters

Why An Inquiry Is Important?

According to the BBC Panorama investigation report [5], there are accounts of purported execution sites where identified bullet holes are in close juncture to the firing range, at a low elevation, as opposed to a gunfight. This report drew some close parallels with Brereton's report highlighting the atrocities by Australian special operations personnel in Afghanistan. The BBC inquiry reported that SAS operatives were competing against one another to achieve a record for the most number of kills.

The manner in which special forces employees were not detained for killing Afghan people who posed no threat, is a dire act of implicit policy. Inevitably, they adhered to the Australian mode of investigation which involved employing "throwdowns" and fraudulent event documentation.

Afghanistan was primarily a counter-insurgency initiative by the UK efforts in support of NATO. Public investigation promotes the greater good of society. If establishing a model for contemporary military actions is a persuasive case and against a public investigation, then the Report ordered by the then-British Prime Minister Gordon Brown over British engagement in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2011 should serve as a main roadmap. This report emphasised significant geopolitical insights connected to 'those components of the UK's participation in Iraq that could be reproduced during subsequent missions.'⁵ It also recognised the particulars of the Iraq War but also that of universal instructions, including mobilising of troops, ISR capabilities of the Forces, and the best way to create a post-conflict Iraq, which might be relevant to potential interventions in the future.

Further UK's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has brought out shreds of evidence on how this issue is crucial in testimony to foreign boots on the ground, especially those engaged in security and humanitarian operations. Despite multiple rounds of debate, inquiries were brought up concerning why British troops along with its collaborators weren't equipped with the accurate intel to predict the collapse of Kabul following the withdrawal of the forces - and why the recommendations rendered by the FCDO's principal risk report didn't cover such early warnings.[6]

[5] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-62083196>

[6] <https://bfpj.co.uk/2021/09/fasc-dominic-raab/>

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Roadmap

There should be law enforcement mechanisms and systems for failing to adhere to human rights or fair conduct. The fact that the UNGA chose to remain silent in this situation is concerning. The United Nations, Human Rights Conventions, and International Law are instrumental in global governance. It often depends on many variables, such as the precise agreements and legal frameworks under which these forces are stationed, the engagement norms they adhere to, and the extent of the host nation's and international organisations' participation and oversight. Additionally, there are strategic and operational-scale lessons, which undoubtedly add relevance to any future counter-insurgency missions undertaken by foreign troops in zones of active militancy.

Climate Change: Afghanistan Is Among The Most Vulnerable Countries

<https://pajhwok.com/2023/07/16/afghanistan-among-most-vulnerable-countries-to-climate-change/>

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan (UNOCHA) on Sunday said Afghanistan was among the top ten countries experiencing it.

Comments

The crisis has been going on even before the withdrawal of NATO troops, diplomatic representations and the Taliban's occupation in 2021. The economy is in turmoil with high inflation, a fall in GDP by 20% resulting in a price surge of more than 50% for necessities.

- **Locust infestation on the rise:** The current increase in locust infestation is a direct impact of a shift in rainfall patterns. Owing to prolonged drought and sparse precipitation, Moroccan locusts' biological and environmental requirements are being met. The soil is thus left unaltered and arid, yet with just the right amount of hydration for the embryos to develop earlier and the larval stage to flourish on the scant flora. Afghanistan lost between 8 and 25 percent of its yearly wheat yield owing to its past locust outbreaks. If the outbreak expands a loss of 700,000 to 1.2 million metric tonnes of grain might occur, accounting for up to one-fourth of the entire yield. The worst impacted areas were Samanghan, Baghlan, and Kunduz. The majority of the damaged region was pastures, which also included cereal grains and cover crop varieties. Occupying sixth place amongst the nations ravaged by disasters, the Taliban administration has further exacerbated the situation without having the means and knowledge necessary for coping mechanisms. Afghanistan maintained a robust locusts management scheme, which involved employing both chemical procedures and conventional ways in response to all outbreak symptoms.

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Source: Al Jazeera

Although Afghan peasants are accustomed to pest outbreaks, subjected to sanctions, the dearth of support amid the present infestation has put them at risk. If not managed properly, the outbreak could trigger widespread destruction outside of Afghanistan including the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics.

- **Floods:** Annually, a percentage of Afghans lose their lives to floods, landslides and torrential downpours in regions where houses are often poorly constructed. According to a UN report, the decades-long conflict and rising temperatures have aggravated the frequency of natural disasters. The recent floods in Jalrez, Saydabad, Chaki Wardak, and Maidan Shahr have deepened Afghanistan's food insecurity. Because of the existing drought-like conditions, and inadequate drainage control systems in place, even moderate downpours can swiftly trigger flash flooding and landslides. Although no reliable flood hazard maps currently exist, the population at large is typically aware that they reside in flood-prone areas through direct observation or from the traditional accounts of their ancestral homes. Post the Taliban takeover, most climate experts have moved out and Taliban officials holding senior ranks are not competent enough to address the mitigation strategies. They have further ceased the operations for water management agencies. Given the draconian policies towards education, women, and climate management, the Taliban has lost its credibility to support Afghanistan in combatting climate change.

Global Stakeholders have begun promoting effective resolutions that endorse the fight against climate change and the approaches to be undertaken for the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28)**. The earlier COP27 reached a ground-breaking consensus on establishing a Loss and Damage Fund for nations that are impacted severely by ecological disasters.[7] Despite being on the list of nations prone to extreme climatic disasters, Afghanistan had no representation at COP27 since the Taliban de facto leadership is not globally recognised.

[7] <https://www.unocha.org/news/afghanistan-alarmed-effects-climate-change>

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- **Food Insecurity:** Nearly 20 million people are reportedly experiencing L-3 or L-4 levels of food insecurity[8]. Children below the age of 5 are at risk from chronic severe malnutrition. Reports by WFP allude that Ghor province reportedly fell into L-5 acute malnutrition, a sign of impending famine. UNDP estimates nearly three fourth of the female workforce had been instrumental in administering the necessary aid in Afghanistan. However, restriction on women volunteering for nonprofit agencies has impeded the flow of supplies, notably dietary supplements to millions of Afghans. In 2021, The Taliban authorities reached a groundbreaking decision with former Imran Khan's govt to permit India to deliver 50,000 MT of grain to Afghanistan through Pakistan, using the land route. However, given the agreed timeframe proved by Pakistan, India could only export 40,000 MT through land and the rest 10,000 MT via Chabahar port. Apart from the SCO superpowers like China and Russia, India has not given political recognition to the current Taliban administration, but this has not prevented Indians from assisting Afghanistan in dealing with humanitarian problems.[9]

Call to Action

Following the Taliban takeover, the West, IMF and World Bank Group removed the Central Bank of Afghanistan's accreditation. In 2022, both Afghan and global NGOs pushed for a set of directives for resuming the Afghan central bank's operations and releasing foreign Afghani frozen assets. In Sep 2022, America promised to release and transfer the frozen funds to a Swiss-based trust to be utilised for the Afghan mass. However, the mandate excludes humanitarian causes post months of negotiations with the Taliban, Swiss and other stakeholders. The nation still experiences a severe cash shortage and liquidity issues. Firms, nonprofit organisations, and private financial institutions still cite significant operating limitations. Basic central banking operations cannot be executed by the Central Bank of Afghanistan.



Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network

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Even the most fundamental financial services are still severely restricted. Without easing limitations on the financial infrastructure to allow for legal trade and humanitarian support, America and other countries will not be able to solve Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis. Additionally, there are significant political and economic headwinds in the immediate neighbourhood which are likely to tip the ongoing crisis.

The COP27-agreed Loss and Damage Fund for vulnerable nations must materialise and assist Afghanistan in developing detection mechanisms and finding strategies that will improve their economy. It must sponsor and support land restoration, and provide communities with the means to adapt to global warming and accordingly broaden their financial methods. Strategies and methods to eliminate poverty and malnutrition to assist the nation's sustainable food supply should be implemented.

The Indian administration desires the Taliban to ensure Afghanistan doesn't harbour Pakistan-backed terror outfits to threaten Indian sovereignty and interests, and that Kabul needs a more diverse and inclusive approach within the government. India maintained its position on the internal conflicts to be resolved by Afghan authorities. In the event of a prolonged disagreement, the administration may have to take the call with which nations Afghanistan is looking for cooperation to ensure humanitarian aid reaches the Afghan people on time.

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[8] <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/fao-warns-of-severe-locust-outbreak-across-8-provinces-in-afghanistan/article66842480.ece>

[9] NSA Ajit Doval stated earlier this year at a security conference on Afghanistan in Moscow that India will never "abandon" the Afghan people in their hour of need.