

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد  
بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم  
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

20.07.2022

## Night Raids and Executions: the SAS in Afghanistan



Image Source: Cap Badge of the UK Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) – Public Domain

The investigation by the *Panorama* programme of the BBC of the SAS unit alleged to have killed 54 detainees in Afghanistan in a six month period was wholly convincing. The death squads, which is what they were, appear to have made only cursory efforts to conceal the arbitrary killings, presumably because they had been covertly approved by senior officers.

A senior officer who worked at UK Special Forces headquarters told the BBC there was “real concern” over the squadron’s reports.

“Too many people were being killed on night raids and the explanations didn’t make sense,” he said. “Once somebody is detained, they shouldn’t end up dead. For it to happen

over and over again was causing alarm at HQ. It was clear at the time that something was wrong.”

Internal emails from the time show that officers reacted with disbelief to the reports, describing them as “quite incredible” and referring to the squadron’s “latest massacre”. An operations officer emailed a colleague to say that “for what must be the 10th time in the last two weeks” the squadron had sent a detainee back into a building “and he reappeared with an AK”.

The email reads: “Then when they walked back in to a different A [building] with another B [fighting-age male] to open the curtains, he grabbed a grenade from behind a curtain and threw it at the c/s [SAS assault team]. Fortunately, it didn’t go off... this is the 8th time this has happened... You couldn’t MAKE IT UP!”

As the concerns grew, one of the highest-ranking special forces officers in the country warned in a secret memo that there could be a “deliberate policy” of unlawful killing in operation. Senior leadership became so concerned that a rare formal review was commissioned of the squadron’s tactics. But when a special forces officer was deployed to Afghanistan to interview personnel from the squadron, he appeared to take the SAS version of events at face value.

The BBC understands that the officer did not visit any of the scenes of the raids or interview any witnesses outside the military.

I want to make a further point about the night raids and the execution of prisoners, many of them held on the flimsiest evidence provided by paid informants who were often personal or tribal enemies. By so doing, the SAS delegitimised the Afghan government, foreign intervention, and became the recruiting sergeant for the Taliban.

The Americans had a similar campaign of killing alleged roadside bomb makers in Iraq. But a military survey found that the deaths only served to increase the number of bomb attacks on their forces. On the occasions when a death squad did kill a bomb making kingpin, he was immediately replaced by a more enthusiastic deputy or a vengeful family member and American losses went up.

Regular armies never seem to learn the lesson that a well-led insurgency will always try to lure them into inflicting collective punishment on a community. The French did this in Algeria, the Americans in Vietnam, the British in Northern Ireland – and then again in Helmand.

*Patrick Cockburn is the author of [War in the Age of Trump](#) (Verso).*

**CounterPunch 19.07.2022**