

Two New Zealand soldiers killed in Afghanistan

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16 August 2012

Two New Zealand soldiers were killed in an ambush in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province on August 4, bringing the number of NZ deaths in the decade-long, neo-colonial occupation to seven.

Another six NZ soldiers were injured, three seriously, when members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) were attacked by insurgents armed with anti-tank weapons, rifles and machine guns. It was the most devastating single-action loss by the NZ armed forces since the Vietnam War.

The bodies of Lance Corporals Pralli Durrer and Rory Malone were flown back to Christchurch by a US Air Force transport for an armed forces service last Saturday. Both had been on their first combat deployment.

Defence Force (NZDF) chief, Lieutenant General Rhys Jones, said the PRT had been called to help members of the Afghan police who were taking heavy fire from insurgents in a compound near a village south of Do Abe. It was initially reported that a NZDF armoured vehicle was hit by an anti-tank rocket, resulting in one death, and when the troops dismounted to secure the area the second soldier was killed.

A subsequent version stated that both soldiers were killed by rifle fire after they dismounted the armoured vehicle. A number of insurgents were reported to have been killed, and two captured. Two members of the Afghan special police were killed and 11 injured.

Two days later, the New Zealand forward patrol base in Do Abe came under attack from rocket fire. There were no casualties, but insurgents got within 50 to 100 metres of the camp, where they remained for an hour before breaking off the attack. The Taliban claimed responsibility for both incidents.

The soldiers' deaths are a tragedy, particularly for their families. A growing number of young men have

been sacrificed, and \$NZ185 million expended, fighting the bogus "war on terror" in Afghanistan.

The events further exposed the fraudulent character of the pretext that has been used by the New Zealand ruling elite and its compliant media to justify the military deployment.

The 140-strong PRT was sent to Bamiyan in 2003 by the previous Labour government following the despatch of an elite SAS combat unit. According to the official propaganda, the PRT is a "peacekeeping" unit carrying out "reconstruction" tasks, such as building schools and hospitals and repairing infrastructure for a grateful Afghan population. Bamiyan province is depicted as one of the more stable and peaceful areas of the country—made safe through the activities of the PRT.

In reality, the war in Afghanistan has nothing to do with rebuilding the country, "fighting terrorism" or establishing democracy. It is a neo-colonial war aimed at transforming Afghanistan into a base for US economic and strategic dominance over the resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. The occupation is aimed at crushing resistance and entrenching the US-backed regime of President Hamid Karzai.

The sheer hypocrisy of repeated media claims that the war is being prosecuted to remove the threat of Al Qaeda has recently been underscored by revelations that the US and its allies are currently supporting Al Qaeda-linked fighters as part of their proxy war for regime-change in Syria.

The PRT in Bamiyan is as much a part of the occupation as the major combat units operating elsewhere. In his 2011 book *Other People's Wars*, researcher Nicky Hager revealed that troops at the main New Zealand base in the province were working

secretly under the US military command and in close collaboration with CIA operatives.

The ongoing Afghan resistance has thrown the US and its allies into crisis. Large areas of the country, especially in the south and east, are controlled by anti-occupation militias. The “surge” of 30,000 additional troops ordered by US President Barack Obama into Kandahar and Helmand provinces has resulted in attacks shifting to other areas. The strategic situation has deteriorated in the northern areas, including Bamiyan, which has seen growing conflict.

In August 2010, NZDF Lieutenant Timothy O’Donnell was killed, and three others injured, during an attack on a patrol in the area. Earlier this year, Corporal Douglas Hughes died of self-inflicted wounds at Romero forward patrol base in Bamiyan. According to a report in the *Dominion Post* on August 6, the insurgents who carried out the latest ambush were a new, more “sophisticated” group sent to specifically target the NZ troops.

In the wake of the deaths, the entire New Zealand political establishment closed ranks. Prime Minister John Key said the deaths of the two men were “an enormous price to pay,” but reinforced the danger faced “by our forces as they work tirelessly to restore stability to the province.” He claimed to be confident that things were “improving in the war-torn country.” Key said the deaths would not affect the date of NZ troops’ planned withdrawal next year.

Newspaper editorials unanimously demanded the government not “cut and run” from Afghanistan. The Chicago NATO summit in May, which New Zealand attended, formally ratified the Obama administration’s plans for a phased drawdown of combat forces, while laying the groundwork for a continued US-led military presence to 2024 and beyond.

Labour Party leader David Shearer, previously a UN senior advisor in Afghanistan, said the deaths did not make him reconsider whether the troops should remain in the country. He repeated the mantra that the NZ contingent was doing an “amazing job.” Bamiyan province was “as good as it gets,” Shearer claimed.

The Green Party called for New Zealand’s “contribution” to end when the current rotation’s tour was up in October, while echoing the lies justifying the deployment. Co-leader Metiria Turei said the PRT had been doing “very well” in Afghanistan, “supporting the

community” there. Foreign affairs spokesman Kennedy Graham said the party supported “reconstruction work” but the escalation of hostilities in the region had seen troops increasingly used to monitor and defuse tensions. “The rationale, which we originally supported, appears to have eroded to the point where there is no sound reason for them to be there,” Graham said.

The government last week gave the PRT authority to expand patrols beyond Bamiyan province, ostensibly to “monitor insurgent movements” more effectively. Prime Minister Key refused to rule out the possibility of dispatching more troops in the months leading up to the withdrawal.

New Zealand’s involvement in the Afghan quagmire is fundamentally calculated to ensure US backing for the NZ corporate elite’s own commercial and strategic interests in the Pacific and internationally. The *New Zealand Herald’s* political editor, John Armstrong, pointed to the real agenda at work. To be “blunt and mercenary,” he noted, “the Afghan deployment has served its foreign policy purpose in helping to rebuild defence ties with the United States. That job done, it is time to go.”



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