

All Afghan detainees likely tortured: diplomat

Last Updated: Wednesday, November 18, 2009 | 10:17 PM ET [Comments 993](#)[Recommend 275](#)

[CBC News](#)



Richard Colvin, a former senior diplomat with Canada's mission in Afghanistan, appears before a House of Commons committee Wednesday in Ottawa. (CBC)

All detainees transferred by Canadians to Afghan prisons were likely tortured by Afghan officials and many of the prisoners were innocent, says a former senior diplomat with Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

Appearing before a House of Commons committee Wednesday, Richard Colvin blasted the detainees policies of Canada and compared them with the policies of the British and the Netherlands.

The detainees were captured by Canadian soldiers then handed over to the Afghan intelligence service, called the NDS.

Colvin said Canada was taking six times as many detainees as British troops and 20 times as many as the Dutch.

He said unlike the British and Dutch, Canada did not monitor their conditions; took days, weeks or months to notify the Red Cross; kept poor records; and to prevent scrutiny, the Canadian Forces leadership concealed this behind "walls of secrecy."

"As I learned more about our detainee practices, I came to a conclusion they were contrary to Canada's values, contrary to Canada's interests, contrary to Canada's official policies and also contrary to international law. That is, they were un-Canadian, counterproductive and probably illegal.

"According to our information, the likelihood is that all the Afghans we handed over

were tortured. For interrogators in Kandahar, it was a standard operating procedure," Colvin said.

He said the most common forms of torture were beatings, whipping with power cables, the use of electricity, knives, open flames and rape.

Colvin worked in Kandahar for the Department of Foreign Affairs in 2006. He later moved to Kabul, where he was second-in-command at the Canadian Embassy. In both jobs, Colvin visited detainees transferred by Canadian soldiers to Afghan prisons. He wrote reports about those visits and sent them to Ottawa.

Colvin told the committee that the detainees were not "high-value targets" such as IED bomb makers, al-Qaeda terrorists or Taliban commanders.

"According to a very authoritative source, many of the Afghans we detained had no connection to insurgency whatsoever," he said. "From an intelligence point of view, they had little or no value."

Colvin said some may have been foot soldiers or day fighters but many were just local people at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"In other words, we detained and handed over for severe torture a lot of innocent people."

Colvin said they began informing the Canadian Forces and Foreign Affairs officials about the detainee situation in 2006 with verbal and written reports.

He said the warnings were at first mostly ignored, but by April 2007, they were receiving written messages from government officials that in the future not to put things on paper, but instead use the telephone.

Colvin mentioned David Mulroney, a deputy minister who is now the ambassador to China, as one of the officials who didn't want to hear the allegations.

Colvin said when a new ambassador arrived in May, the paper trail on detainees was reduced and reports on detainees were at times "censored" with crucial information removed.

He said all of these steps were "extremely irregular."

At the time, the government denied there were any credible allegations of torture.

But Tories questioned the validity of Colvin's sources, saying the information he received concerning the allegations were from second-hand and third-hand reports.

Colvin's testimony "seemed dramatic, but under questioning it was revealed to be filmsy, inconsistent, unreliable," Laurie Hawn, parliamentary secretary to Defence Minister Peter MacKay told CBC News. "[He] did not come across as credible."

While he didn't doubt Colvin's sincerity, "every time something has happened in that mission, we have taken action," Hawn said. "And that's evidenced by the improvements in the prison, the training we've done, money we've invested, the visits we've had organized with the various authorities there."

Colvin also said he only spoke to four detainees himself and he had no way to guarantee those prisoners had in fact been captured by Canadian troops.

He also admitted he never raised the allegations with ministers who travelled through Kandahar.

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[DavidRuggles](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/19

at 9:00 PM ETG
Veers, I think you're kind of missing the point. To us, the Geneva Convention, the various charters and constitutions you speak of do mean something. I know you would like to think that these documents are a better way, and really you're right, no denying, things would be great if articles of international law re: torture, child soldiers, terrorism, war etc, etc, etc, were adhered to, by everyone, but that simply isn't reality. The human race simply isn't there yet. There's proof enough of that right here in these forums.

You see, what do us enshrines the rights and freedoms of all human beings is only a piece of paper to someone who doesn't care, to assume that it does and should kind of defeats the purpose of having those pieces of paper. To force those pieces of paper upon others is simply to supplant their freedoms with our opinions.

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[DavidRuggles](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/19

at 8:47 PM ET
Dulcieo wrote:

Posted 2009/11/19

at 3:30 PM ET

To all those posters who are vehemently defending the actions of this government, five words:

YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH.

+++

OH PUHLEEZE!

Pulling over used movie quotes to throw around is well, sad.

But I gotta ask:

What truth do you speak of? Please, entertain us. regail us with your thoughts on truth and what it is in this case.

I'll get some popcorn.

I think that there are only a couple of people on either side of this issue looking at objectively to start with, and frankly I'm not sure even if they're posting. Fact is Dulcideo, you've got no better an idea what is really going on than the rest of us, but at least the rest of us are on topic. All you've offered is?

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[MandyO](#) wrote:Posted 2009/11/19

at 8:27 PM ETDaleMalone wrote: *but when a government willingly and knowingly pulls my countries good name through the mud like this has done, that I will never ever forgive!!!*

Harper has been doing that since he first stepped off Canadian soil as Prime Minister. Both he and his Ministers have used the world stage to pull their slime act on their opponents back home.

The last time Harper tried it, however, it backfired as he had to apologize to Iggy. Maybe he learned a lesson.

Tom Clark's interview with Peter MacKay was excellent. I really liked the way Tom shut MacKay down. Kudos to him.

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[WashingtonCat](#) wrote:Posted 2009/11/19

at 8:16 PM ETDevon K. wrote:Posted 2009/11/19 at 4:51 PM ET: -

"This whole mess was started by Paul Martin when he put our troops into Kandahar and the Liberals began the process of handing over detainees. The Liberals started it and they want Harper to wear it."

~~~~~

Nice try.

You know, for a moment there, searching for my reply to another, the only one I've got on these boards recently, I got the distinct feeling that Devon K was the author of these pages and he controlled the keys to the positing thereupon.

Well, well, well... That doesn't seem to be the case after all... I got my say on someones ridiculous assertions. Now for the next try...

Devon, you are being an ass!

Leftie, rightie, inbetweenie, whatever... commonsense says you just spout nonsense to get a reply and then you can throw trash in the path of any reasoned reply. I can't wait to see your handiwork regarding my comment to your latest spiel.

Afghanistan journey:

Sept. 2001 - under Jean Chretien - 100 Canadian JTF troops planned by the Defense Dept to work under U.S. control. They entered Afghanistan in Jan 2002

It was Jean Chretien that agreed to send the troops on a limited mission to end in 2003 - one year. That obviously got set aside.

2003 moved to Kabul - troops now 600.

2005 moved back to Kandahar, doubling the 600 contingent to 1200.

In the four years of Chretien/Martin gov't. Canada lost 8 soldiers and one diplomat, three soldiers by IED's - one by rollover Lav and four by "friendly fire" - the bomb from on high...

Since then: more than doubling of the troops;

Since then: 124 soldier deaths in 4 years;

Since then: the extension of the mission from the agreed date of 2009 to 2011 (maybe?).

That is why THIS IS HARPER'S WAR - as some would say, "get over it!"

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[Spruce](#) wrote: Posted 2009/11/19

at 7:59 PM ET "Colvin said some may have been foot soldiers or day fighters but many were just local people at the wrong place at the wrong time."

If you ask any criminal once they've been caught, they'd all say they were at the wrong place at the wrong time.

They are Afghan fighters, they should be dealt with by Afghan authorities.

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